The Sergeant of Fort Toronto

GEORGE F. MILLNER

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The sergeant of Fort Toronto.

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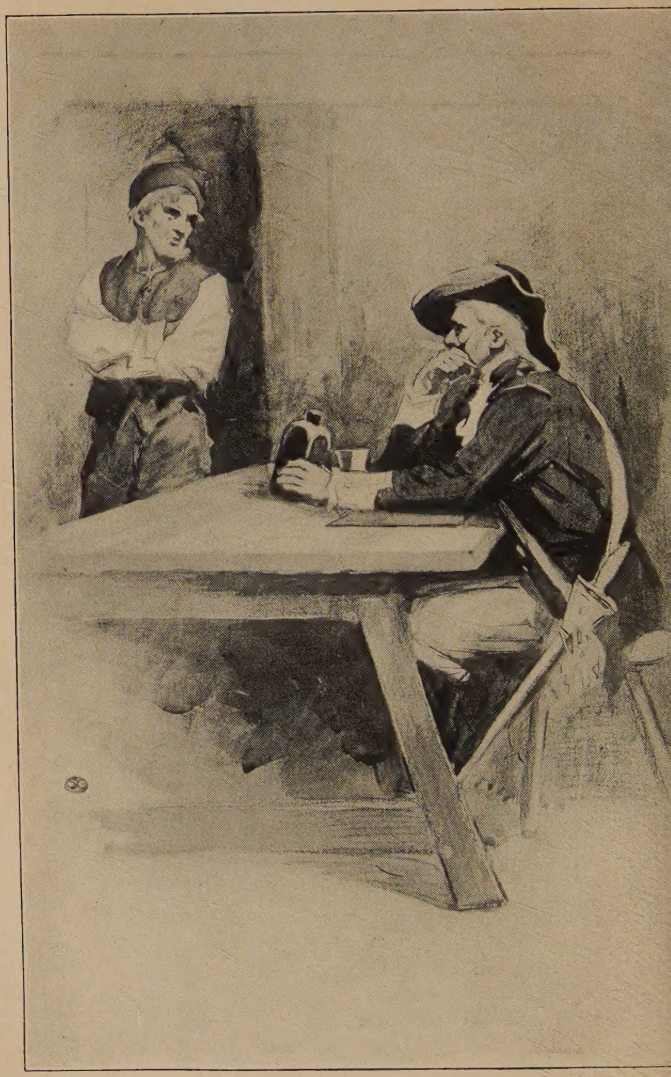

"I AM WAITING, MCLEOD"

THE SERGEANT OF FORT TORONTO

BY
GEORGE F. MILLNER

ILLUSTRATED BY
SEARS GALLAGHER

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PREFATORY NOTE

FEW people read the preface of any book, however great the writer, but, from courtesy to his authorities, the author will follow the example of his literary masters, though the brief description of the historical characters and the historic scenes herewith described may be neglected by the reader in search of romance.

Fort Toronto was originally named Fort Rouille. . . . Fort Rouille was founded by the Marquis de Galissioniere, the acting Governor of New France, as a trading post, where business might be encouraged with the Indians, and to oppose that hated Fort Choueguen established by the British just across the lake. Perhaps, he also sought to impress them, fierce and haughty, by this military occupation of a far-flung outpost, with the prouder, haughtier majesty of the Old France he served. The men who move within the covers of this book, are for the most part, real men. . . . The Reverend Abbe Picquet, Doctor of the Sorbonne, King's Messenger and Prefect Apostolic of all New France, was, as may be gathered from his titles, a most important personage. He founded the mission of La Presentation at Oswegatchie, now Ogdensburg, and many other such missionary institutions, in which he sought to subdue the untamable Iroquois, by other methods than that of cold steel. He visited Fort Toronto, though always opposed to its existence as a rival to Fort Niagara, some thirty-three miles distant across Lake Ontario. He exerted immense influence among the savages with whom he labored. So great that influence, the Marquis du Quesne used to say, the Abbe Picquet was worth ten regiments to New France. His activity was so great, especially among the Six Nations, that even during his lifetime he was complimented with the title "Apostle to the Iroquois." He lived only for New France. Then, at the fall of the French Power, he was forced to retire to the Sorbonne. There, he may have died in the odor of sanctity, but it is cer-

tainly safe to assume that while he lived, an ever-abiding regret was his, New France became the Canada of the victorious British. . . . The Comte de Laudonniere figures prominently in history. His venture south with Ribault, to the Spanish Main, was a dismal failure. He retired to England to live and end his days. . . . Wabacommegat, Chief of the Missassagas, is mentioned as follows, "This day, Wabacommegat, came to speak to me (Norman McLeod), but was so drunk that no one could understand him.". . . As this extract is taken from "The Documentary History of New York," dated July 17 (1767), at the time of British occupation, and the Abbe paid a visit to Fort Toronto in 1751, where he soundly rated the Missassagas for their intemperance, there is ground for supposing that the lessons their Chief Wabacommegat had commenced under French rule, were carried on under British domination. . . . Senascot, his son, was also a real man. But whether he dare oppose his father and chief in the manner herewith described is open to consideration. . . . Norman McLeod lived and had his being as an Indian Agent. He it was who in real life wrote the words quoted above. . . . Jacques Birnon, the grandfather of the romantic hero, was a Hugenot trader to New France, rich, powerful, and under the protection of Louis, to whom he is supposed to have loaned many a never-returned franc. What less likely that such a man should have had one grandson who desired to travel and see the world? . . . Sergeant Pere, it is true, is a creature of the imagination; but his prototype existed by the hundred among the soldiers of his master. . . . Captain de Celeron was an officer stationed at Fort Niagara. Not unreasonable to suppose he was detailed for a tiresome duty in his turn, to command the fifteen soldiers who formed the guard at lonely Fort Toronto. . . . From historical accounts, soldiers were hard to procure. "All sorts and conditions of men" took shelter from a life of error within their ranks. Why not a Corporal Peche to obtain the large bounty granted to each and every recruit? . . . As to the women! They, in those rigorous days, were few and far between. And Madeline McLeod is of the same thin web as her ancient lover. . . . Rose of the Hills, too, moved only on these pages. Though many an Indian drudge may have cast longing eyes on the white men, and in the comparing of a brutal lord and master, raised one soldier to an undue elevation.

Fort Toronto existed, was destroyed by fire at the hands of the French. Real men planted corn, and perhaps, made wine, with which to solace the lonely hours. But it is to be very much doubted, if anyone of those soldiers — not even the far-sighted Abbe — ever supposed for one solitary moment, that tiny Fort Toronto would one day become great TORONTO, the Queen City of the West.

To Scaddings' "Toronto of Old"; "The Documentary History of New York"; and "Kingsford's History of Canada," the author is greatly indebted. To W. F. Metcalf, Esq., he is under obligation for many a French translation. To William Copp, Esq., the writer is also indebted. Without his interest, "The Sergeant of Fort Toronto," would, perhaps, have forever reposed in the desk of

THE AUTHOR.

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THE SERGEANT OF FORT TORONTO

CHAPTER I

A GIRL DISCOVERS A MAN

WHERE thousands gather every year, within a league of half a million souls, a slender granite shaft, set four-square upon a rock-hewn base, points tapering to the skies, to mark the lone spot where but a century and a half gone by France with careful hands planted and tended her famous "fleur-de-lis." Fair blossoms, destined to fade, to wither, and to die, beneath the tread of a few brave feet. The vanguard of a British occupation; forerunners of those who populate the fairest city of fair Canada.

Then the stockaded walls of French Fort Toronto rose on a rising bluff of land overlooking the heaving wastes of Lake Ontario. A tiny trading station, founded by His Excellency, the Marquis de Galissionaire, Acting Administrator and Governor of all New France, in the year of our Lord seventeen hundred and forty-nine, that traffic with the Indians might be encouraged for the benefit of his people.

A tiny clearing of but three hundred acres had been carved from the forest miles. An ax-won spot of sweating toil and arduous labor at the hands of brave and brawny men. A space encroached on daily by leafy growths and spreading underbrush. A solitude made more solitary by the presence of a garrison consisting of but eighteen men and one lone woman; sole defenders of the glorious prestige of Old France, who perhaps remembered, but was just as likely to forget them in the turmoil of her own more immediate pressing home affairs.

The leaves whispered of the sorry efforts of foolish soldiers who tried to sweep giants from the earth, of their daylong la-

bors to stay the advance of stripling pines, ever ready to spring up, and hide the scars of their wounded forest mother. But the wind, more ancient than the monster trees, knowing of what man had done, could do, and might even yet perform, bade the triflers hush their laughter, and whisper a warning to their parents of a swiftly coming doom.

But the forest was in all its glory on this brilliant September dawn. Beneath its shade lay Fort Toronto, a collection of a few low log buildings, girdled by massive tree trunks, huddled for shelter within their circling embrace. The night had been stormy, tempestuous, and the lake had roared a loud displeasure. The branches dripped moisture and the shingled roofs gleamed a faint reflection of the rising sun.

Silence reigned, save for the stealthy stirring of some wild creature in the underbrush. The huge gate was barred against intruders, and but one lone sentry maintained a monotonous promenade inside its heavy timbers.

Suddenly the air was split with the roar of a gun. The daily salute to the sun. The thunderous rattle crashed back from wooded walls, rolled out over the lake to die away in faint mutterings of spent sound. An eddying smoke wreath hung low over the stockade walls; a drum clattered continuously for several moments. Then, above the pointed stakes rose the proud banner of Old France, challenging to mortal combat any venturesome enough to dispute her lawful supremacy at this, her far-flung trading outpost.

Day, for the garrison, had just commenced.

The gate of the stockade was thrown wide and a young girl emerged from its safety. Quickly she moved over the short stubble of new garnered wheat lying between the lake and the only home she knew. Straight as a young pine she walked. A girl with oval face, olive complexioned, but clear-skinned as the " Fameuse " apples of her own more famous country. Two gray eyes were hers, within whose clear depths shone health, and a happy nature. Her nose, fine chiseled, the nostrils expanded to greet the perfume of dawn, was set above two red lips, a rosebud made for caresses, given by one who should some day appear and claim her consent to take them. And those lips moved religiously in prayer as she hurried toward the blue-black stretch of water, in search of her daily bath for a dainty and well-cared-for person.

THE MONUMENT IN THE EXHIBITION GROUNDS, TORONTO, WHICH MARKS THE SITE OF THE OLD FRENCH FORT

She reached the shore, flung a backward glance at the Fort, then with busy fingers commenced to throw off her homespun garments. Suddenly a startled scream escaped her. She saw a man extended full length upon the beach. A strange white man; an intruder on her favorite bathing place.

"Blessed Lady!" she exclaimed, hastily rebuttoning the collar at her white throat. "I wonder who he may be?" One moment she hesitated, frightened. The next found her slender body stealing with moccasined feet toward the stranger, lying with upturned features to the blue sky. Her fingers sought a sign of life in the mottled, half-bare chest, and with a shudder, she rose, pitying, wide eyes staring at a most unexpected discovery. "I wonder, does he live?" she murmured, half trembling in the silence.

The destitute uncomfort of the man appealed to her latent mother instinct. She robbed herself of a warm woolen petticoat, laying the garment over his naked chest. Then, blushing at the forwardness of her maiden action, she turned, climbed the bank, and ran swiftly back toward the Fort.

"Father! Father!" she called, slipping past the startled sentry, and passing through the dark-arched entry. "Quick, I have discovered a man." And Norman McLeod, the storekeeper of the Fort, hurried out to greet her.

"Discovered a what, child?" he said with a grim chuckle. "'Tis no new thing in this land, where none but men dare venture, is it?" But his daughter, repeating her request, vanished through the gate, to leave him staring, wondering at her hurry.

"Some new whim!" he muttered half angrily, reaching for a well-used musket. "Madeline!" he called, following across the sand, to break into a run after her speeding figure. "What in the name of all the saints possesses her now?" he growled, pounding heavily along. Then, he stood stock still, his mind filled with alarm of it all being a ruse to surprise his home.

He was not in the best possible humor this fine morning. Affairs of business had gone all wrong of late. Only last night had he had hot words with his superior officer, Captain de Celeron, the commander, regarding a matter of trade. A youngster, despatched from Niagara, knowing little of trade, to succeed, as the garrison openly hinted at, his own more able authority.

"And she must add to my troubles," he said angrily. "Who can this fellow be?" Again he set off running, coming to the bank edge above the shore, to see his daughter kneeling at a stranger's side. "What new folly is this, Madeline?" he asked harshly. "Who is he?"

"I do not know," she answered, without turning her head. "Come! assist me to drag him from the water. I do not think he is dead — yet."

"I will have naught to do with him," came the curt answer.

"At least drag him from the water," she said quickly. "He will die indeed, if we waste time in talk."

"Better die now than at the end of a rope," was the grim retort from the father, turning to retrace his steps. But a gentle hand caught his arm, a soft voice pleaded in his ear, and his unwilling feet were led nearer the sparkling waters, crooning a melody to silent ears. "He is quite dead," he said, with evident relief, and the girl sighed, as she fell on her knees.

The storekeeper, with experienced eyes, was quick to note British make on all the garments of the senseless man. With a pang of pity, he observed the fine lines of his features; the well-kept hands that even in a death-clutch closed on the gunwale of the battered birch-bark. Remembrance of old times — old friends — stirred a kindly wish in his heart that the stranger might indeed be dead. New France at the moment was cruel to those of British inclination, cast destitute upon her shores.

"Better be dead from drowning than to swing at a rope's end," he muttered, and his daughter, catching the words, spoke almost impatiently.

"What has a rope to do with one well nigh — if not dead?" she flashed out. "Come, drag him from the lake, I say — that much at least."

But the father made no move. His officer hated the British with right good will. He was ever haunted, and with good cause, that the daring enemies of his country might steal in and surprise a first independent command. The bare whisper of an English name, sufficient to loose all his fury on the head of the unfortunate voicing that detested sound. Norman McLeod knew his man. Was unwilling to add another brand to the flames of enmity, lit recently, but rapidly making Fort Toronto far too hot for comfort of himself and only daughter. He stood silent, pondering the matter, gazing on the silent

figure, whose soul seemed already to have passed the curtain separating the living from the dead.

"Madeline," he said slowly, "let him lie. His clothes are of British pattern — you know De Celeron."

"I care not one jot who he is," she said quickly. "Lift him from the water, I say. Are you afraid?" — and the father, recognizing the folly of opposing a spoiled child, stooped to drag roughly the man from the water. With no soft hand he deposited his burden beneath the overhanging bank.

"Now," he said, drying his hands on his homespun coat, "we will return, and our little Captain will have something to say about this."

"I wait here," she said shortly.

"The man is dead, girl. Come, we must return," and he turned to go, confidently expecting obedience. For once he was mistaken. His daughter, interested in the novel appearance of a total stranger — to her mind, an event not to be lightly passed over in this desolate place where new faces rarely came — was determined to stay on the spot. She continued kneeling, wiping the foam from blue lips she feared would never thank her for the trouble. The father, a jealous twinge at his heart, scowled at her attention. Then he said gruffly, "Come, girl, we must return." But she made no sign of moving.

"He breathes!" she exclaimed, her bosom heaving with excitement of her desire to have the man live. "Summon assistance, I say. He shall not be left untended to die the death of a dog."

With a curse at her willfulness, likely to set the Fort in a blaze of passion, he threw his musket on the ground, to fold his arms across a brawny chest. "Then we both stay," he said sullenly. "Stay, until the red devils and their masters, who baited this trap, come hither to find their fool quarry."

"Oh, let us go," she answered, rising from the ground, to run up the bank. "Since it is necessary we both go, let us hurry. How slow you are," she said, then set off running toward the Fort.

"Slow, am I?" muttered the man. "Slow! well, 'tis what youth says to the aged, and why should child of mine differ from the others." Muttering to himself, even yet suspicious of a trap, he hurried after his daughter. "She is growing beyond

my care. I will send her to Mount Royal, with Pere Picquet, when next he comes to address his Missassagas. She shall be placed with the good sisters, and if I know aught they will have their hands full." Solemnly wagged his gray head, as he reached the gateway, where she stood conversing with an excited sentry.

"Haste, father. Please!" she said. "To the Captain, at once."

Suddenly the soldier came to the present. He was first to observe a tall young officer, wearing the uniform of a French marching regiment, standing close.

"Why this energy so wasteful?" he said with a slight frown.

"Oh, Captain de Celeron, I have discovered a man upon the beach. I beseech you to send aid to him. I do not think he is dead."

"A man! And how came he there without you becoming aware of his approach?" The last, to the shaking soldier, shivering at the angry eyes fixed full on his reddened face. "Answer me, idiot."

"I do not know, my Captain," he stammered. "Ma'amselle ran in, ran out — ran out and in, I mean to say, and now is here, I —"

"Fool! cannot I see for myself that the lady is here?" Then with a low bow he added, "I pray you explain, Mademoiselle. This imbecile hath lost the little wit he once possessed. 'Tis the sunshine in your eyes dazzling his mind." And the girl blushed crimson, her ears detected a tinge of sarcasm in the extravagant reply.

"While we stand, the man may be dead," she answered sharply.

"Best for him, if he be not of New France."

"So my father said, m'sieu, but I beg of you for the Blessed Mary's sake to send assistance to him. He breathed when, when I —" a teardrop glistened on the long lashes, as she hesitated, and the keen eyes of Captain de Celeron were quick to notice —"when I did what I could for him," she ended slowly.

"Who is he?" he said sharply. "Do you know him?"— the last jealously, for he gave many moments to thought of this girl. Paid more attention to her beauty than to his lawful mistress, New France, whose duty he was paid to do, and who should, seeing the girl gave him no reward, have reigned alone

in his manly affections. "You know him?" he said again, and the girl reddened at the imperious tone.

"I only know he lies upon the beach, near dead — will die, if aid be not furnished him at once," she answered with spirit, and again the devil jealously prompted Captain de Celeron.

"He is a friend of yours?" he muttered, twisting his mustache, as the girl smiled disdainfully.

"All strangers are not my friends," she replied, and the man stood thinking.

This sudden desire to furnish aid to another male was maddening. Military instinct, also aroused, warned him to proceed carefully in the matter. The man with a spy's cunning might have purposely waited on the beach, where the girl, discovering a miserable object, should innocently assist his purpose to enter the Fort. He glanced suspiciously at the storekeeper, saw his features betrayed nothing of import, then curtly hailed a corporal parading a few men.

"Ho! Peche, send two men — you remain here under arms. See the gate be barred." Then very slowly, "Mademoiselle, I go to attend your stranger. You will remain behind in safety."

She took fire at once. "If you fear the slightest danger, I will lead the way," she said with withering disdain.

"Come then, if you will, you must," he answered, swallowing the insult to his courage. "I will aid this man, but if he prove a spy —" He ended abruptly, and the little party moved out in silence, the crash of wooden beams assuring the officer his command had been obeyed.

Rapidly they covered the level plain spread out before the lake. The shore was hidden from view, but the track of footsteps in dewy grass was plain to the eye. Out to the sloping steep bank they came. Out to its very edge. The beach was deserted. But a battered canoe lay as evidence; father and daughter had not dreamed their tale.

"Blessed Mother!" she exclaimed, her face going white. "Where can he have disappeared?" She ran to the birch-bark, her father standing silent and sober looking; but the face of Captain de Celeron was a study in scowling black and white. He said nothing; only, two keen eyes fixed full on the father betrayed suspicion that both parent and daughter knew more than they should of the stranger, totally disappearing at the

moment of attempted rescue.

The girl moved swiftly beneath the bank, a disappointed look on her oval face, that quickly blushed crimson. The petticoat, her garment, lay crumpled on the sand, hidden from the four above. With a quick movement she gathered the discarded apparel beneath her skirt. Then the voice of her father came to her ears and she moved out in full view.

"By all the Saints there was a man," he asserted strongly

"Well — where is he then?" the young man said sharply His lips curved to a sneer, his manner, most sarcastic, intimated to the speaker open disbelief. "Strange a dead man should come to life, and conveniently disappear when I come on the scene."

"Indeed he was there," the girl said angrily. "My father dragged him from the water at my request."

"I said 'twas a trap of the British to surprise us."

"You said that?" snapped the young man. And his companion paled.

"Just that," he answered sharply. "Think you I know naught of red devil ways after years of residence in this land Do I not know them? The man was here, and now is gone — where?" Contemptuous, he shrugged well nigh to his ears

Captain de Celeron stood silent, anxiety for the safety of his command robbing him of speech. Suddenly he turned on the two soldiers, smiling at what they thought to be a harmless prank of their divinity, forgetting a stern father little given to tricks shared her play.

"Fools," he muttered harshly, "search the shore and that speedily. Do you laugh to my back, you shall sweat to my face, when we come again to the Fort, I promise you." And they hurried off, inwardly trembling at a doubtful future.

The girl half turned, as if to assist their search. A glance at her father urged her to his side. She saw a black mood possessed him; that Captain de Celeron was gnawing a lower lip, and to prevent open warfare, second thought bade her remain.

"You are angry with us, monsieur?" she asked. "You surely do not think *we* would betray our only home?"

"I do not suspect you, mademoiselle," came his slow answer "but —" And the unended sentence, the fire in his flashing eyes, enabled her to complete the words he left unsaid.

"You think my father would?" she exclaimed angrily.

"Pardon, if I think rashly — but his unwillingness to assist me — his attitude —"

"Can you blame him?" she said sharply. "He does what he is permitted, under your instructions. Until you came, was commander here, and no one fault was ever found with his conduct of trade — until recently — until you came. Surely you must trust him, or you dare not trust me."

He moved uneasily, under the steady glance of two clear eyes. What he saw in their depths seemed to give courage to his tongue. Suddenly he spoke and the girl stepped back to her father.

"He hates me, I know," he said, striving to master emotion. "Strives to keep you from me — but I love you, Madeline. Love you madly — would do anything to gain your affection and his favor."

The storekeeper came swiftly to life. Whirling the girl behind his strong body, he boldly confronted the man who had displaced his authority, and now dared add insult to injury. "Captain de Celeron," he burst out, "have a care what you say to my daughter. She is no grisette of the faubourgs, I warn you. Your love! You, an officer, and she, a plain storekeeper's daughter. Dare you repeat such folly, and I will immediately set out for Niagara, where your commanding officer may have something to say when I state the reason of my coming. I warn you — we leave this spot the moment you dare repeat such insult."

His companion reddened under the words. "I crave pardon, mademoiselle," he muttered. "I forgot myself — I make my apologies to your good father, an he will allow it."

The storekeeper turned contemptuously away. His evident hostility aroused deep resentment in the mind of the younger man. He stood, his eyes set in a hard stare, angry, brain busy with what he would do, should opportunity halt at his door. This cursed boor, to come between him and his one desire. He should pay dearly for such impertinence. Some day would come the chance to separate the two. Then, she might come to him for protection. He would grant it. Name of ten thousand devils, yes! But at a price. And the purchase should cost her dear. Slight attention would be paid at headquarters, if a common storekeeper and his daughter were reported miss-

ing. The man should certainly be absent some fine morning! The girl! Well, she would be officially missing also, but someone would know of her whereabouts. He smiled grimly. He thought he knew who that one would be!

The return of the soldiers roused him from unholy gloating. "There is no man, my Captain," one hurried to say, and the other not to be outdone in zeal, "Not a hair of one to be discovered." And their officer smiled. He was certain now. The discovery of the stranger, his trance swoon; all part of a plot to surprise an envied command.

"Back to the Fort," he snapped out. "McLeod, you are under arrest pending further inquiry as to this man. Mademoiselle, you walk with me."

She flashed a haughty glance at his imperious command, raised her eyebrows in surprise, then moved to her father, who smiled at her treatment of the man he had grown to hate. And he followed in their rear, as silent, savaging his underlip, because he knew fear. Not fear for his own person. But the safety of a first independent command — dear to one of his youth, menaced by the appearance of this stranger, who, because of his sudden, unaccountable absence at the first approach of French aid must surely be a British spy — caused him grave uneasiness.

He knew his enemies more than aggressive. His lone outpost, miles distant from relief, lost to France, should they attack its walls. And their red-devil helpers, the Iroquois, ever ready for slaughter at the first command of their allies! He shuddered, picturing the scene, and the possibility of their being at hand. This stranger must have been of British nationality to penetrate safely through their yelling hordes. That much was certain, for no Frenchman dared attempt such madness.

Who was he? What his purpose? Had the storekeeper knowledge of him? Was the daughter implicated? Were both engaged in treachery to his own beloved New France?

"She may know something," he muttered, unwilling to believe aught against her. "It cannot be she would be so basely treacherous. Yet, she is his daughter — may let fall something, if I question her — a something that will place me on guard. I will speak to her." One long stride placed him at her elbow. "Mademoiselle," he calmly commenced, though

the nearness of her presence, the subtle perfume of her body, caused a whirling in his brain, " believe me, when I say I deeply regret this necessary action of arrest. But as commander — I —" He ended dramatically, pointing to the Fort —" I must be careful. I must."

They had come to the gate, swinging wide to receive them, and they entered to its precarious shelter. The wooden bars were slammed into place, and the two soldiers waited the order to dismiss. Their comrades on parade a short distance from where the little party stood so far forgot a rigid discipline as to cast curious stares in their direction. Then, the young man observant of these details received a stinging reply, causing his very flesh to tingle.

" Captain de Celeron," she said quietly, facing him bravely, though her bosom heaved stormily under the stuff dress, " I have heard that you are careful — exceeding so. Know you so careful of my person, you would seize any chance to separate father and daughter; for what — I will leave to those who observe your actions. But remember, I am no foolish girl. My father, long in the service of New France, certainly not an ignorant man. He, be it known to you, has cautioned me of your carefulness," this, with a slight sneer. " And I warn you, do you dare harm either of us, father or daughter, there be those in authority who will hearken to my tale. So I say, be warned in time. Remember! I have the honor to bid you a very good morning, Captain de Celeron. My absence will at least remove the necessity for your carefulness of my poor person."

She turned, disappeared, an easy laugh upon her lips. But once within the privacy of her lodging — a room to the rear of the crowded storehouse — a flood of tears flowed. In her heart a sense of dread grew daily at the persistence of this man, who dogged her every footstep, and openly showed his resentment did she dare smile, even on one of his eighteen men.

Outside in the clear sunlight her father laughed openly at the check to his superior officer. The two soldiers were also on the broad grin. But their officer, white with rage, savagely gnawing a short mustache, turned their merriment to instant sobriety. His manner, furious and abrupt, even paled the cheek of the father, thinking of the safety of a well-loved daughter.

" To the Missassagas, you," he snapped. " Bid the young

brave, Senascot, come hither with all speed." As the two disappeared, glad to be out of reach, "Come with me, McLeod. To my quarters we will go, and there I will have the truth of this matter, if I stretch your lying tongue from its roots. Remember, if your daughter make merry with me, I am your superior officer, and I may discover means to enjoy my share of laughter, when you are not on hand to encourage her impertinence. Come," he snarled and walked off across the stockaded inclosure, brushing aside the obsequious corporal, who would have stayed him with some question as to the men.

Norman McLeod swallowed hard at the lump in his throat, but followed silently. He almost regretted his ill-timed laughter. He dared not think how far a man might go in following a desire. And his daughter. He shivered, thinking of her safety, if danger came his way.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN DISCOVERS HIMSELF, TO LOSE HIMSELF AGAIN

"CURSE these Indian canoes. How they leak, at times!" The words were muttered drowsily, the lips uttering them chattered with cold and exhaustion. Francis Birnon, opening his eyes to blink wearily in the powerful sunlight, caught a glimpse of overhanging bank, where to his last remembrance the blackness of wild night had appeared. Then he attempted to rise.

The movement caused his every muscle to creak agony. A groan escaped him, and again he fell back senseless on the sand. Again he woke. Struggled to realize where he was. Bewildered, he gazed about on all sides. Noted his position on a deserted beach, and with a tremendous effort rolled over on his face. Groping, clutching at the grass growing on the bank, he pulled his body upright, supporting aching limbs against the earth, pouring a cascade of dust about two weary feet.

The world appeared loose from its anchorage to his swimming vision. Round and round in dizzy circles swept the mirrored lake, or so it seemed to his whirling brain. His eyes chanced on the crumpled canoe, and the sight brought stern reality to his elbow. With lightning speed flashed through his mind the battle with last night's storm; that desperate clinging to a canoe, with grip that naught save the icy fingers of death should loose. The furious waves doing their giant best to beat life from his body. Then blind, suffocating unconsciousness, and now — where was he?

"Fort Toronto must be nigh at hand," he muttered. "I thought I saw lights last night." Groping for a flask carried in a hip pocket, unscrewing the top with chattering teeth, he gulped a huge draft. A satisfied sigh escaped him. Carefully replacing the receptacle, he stood, trying to take in more clearly his surroundings. Then his glance fell on a woolen garment, and he crouched quickly. "A woman's skirt," he muttered. "Someone has been here to discover me."

A panic seized him. For the minute his eyes saw blackness.

Then he struggled upright, peering cautiously over the bank for sign of his discoverer. Over the stubble level with his eyes marched the sturdy shape of a stalwart man, a musket thrown over his shoulder. Beyond, hurried the slim figure of a girl; beyond her again, a sentry stood on guard at the open gate of a high stockade, whose rough timbers sheltered the mud-chinked walls of several low log buildings. He stood watching, until the three were swallowed in the dark entry. Then with a gasp, sank on the sand, the question of immediate escape troubling his muddled mind.

"I must make way out of this place," he muttered drowsily. "They have gone to alarm the garrison. If I am discovered — here —"

He mumbled his words with an effort, for the fiery liquor imbibed on an empty stomach, combined with the exposure of a dreadful night, was proving too much for him, soldier as he had been and one accustomed to some hardship on the field. Francis Birnon found his eyelids come together of their own accord. His head sought his chest. Again he wandered in the mazes of sleep land, and for many moments remained unconscious. Then, obeying a subconscious prompting, he struggled to his feet, staggered toward the lake edge, splashed along the frothing shallows with all the irresponsibility of one drunken, not caring where he wandered, as God-protected drunkards are prone to do.

How far his rambling feet and straying wits traveled he never knew. He half wakened at the touch of a hand on his arm, to see a leering savage face. Then sleep, the rest his brain and body craved and must have, regained the mastery, and he sank into an embrace, seeming soft as fleecy wool.

"White man drunk — drunk as Missassaga," a harsh voice whispered in his ear. The broken French, the rough gutturals of Indian language, assured him he dreamed. Of that he was certain. Care for personal safety was flung to the wide wings. One of his guides had escaped the lake, and would see no harm happened him. Of that also he was assured. Morpheus sealed his eyes and he was happy. "White man, fool," muttered the same voice, and the sleeper smiled, thinking how foolish were the visions of a dream.

But the speaker was a living, wide-awake reality. Wabacommegat, Chief of the Missassagas, moving unsteadily to his wig-

wam, also in search of sleep to recover from a debauch of French brandy obtained from a thieving soldier of the garrison, paused in his way. Stood staring with drunken seriousness at the senseless man who had stumbled into his arms, and fallen from their weak grasp to the hard sand.

"White man drunk," he muttered, drunkenly shaking his head at such a sorry spectacle, and turning to see if any comrade followed. Not a soul was in sight. Placing his hands to his mouth he emitted a most unearthly yell, and two young braves came running at the sound.

"Where did my father find this man?" the younger of the two asked gravely, after a short silence, during which the Chief had glorious visions of a future steeped in liquor. "He is bad medicine for us," he ventured. But his father swayed silent, his brain filled with but one idea. This stranger, himself drunk, might furnish a parched throat with a draught of longed-for strongwater.

"Carry him to my lodge," he said thickly. "When he wakes I would speak with him. I, your Chief, command it," he added sternly to awe his half rebellious son. And the young man, understanding his father was far from sober, in no mood to be questioned on his doings, motioned his companion to lift the stranger from the ground.

"French and British — bad enemies," grunted the other, as they stumbled along.

"Were the first to know the Missassaga gave shelter to the second, it would go hard with them," Senascot replied moodily. He, noting the sleeper's clothes, thought him to be of British origin. "My father is not wise," he added, then fell silent.

The outcurving bank gave way to a smoothly sloping sweep of once green turf, level with the lake. Pitched on its trampled surface, some thirty feet from the shore, rose several tepees, their gaudily painted covers showing coarse and dirty in the clean sunlight. Before the largest, clutching with both hands at the skins, waited Wabacommegat. Save for the three Indians and the stranger, the place seemed deserted. Not one soul witnessed the carrying in of that silent figure to its foul resting place.

"Good!" grunted the old man. "Senascot, wait without. I need sleep. When this man wakes I will speak with him." Passing inside, he dropped the tepee cover, regardless of the

stony glare in the eyes of his only son, angry, but forced to unwillingly obey.

"Let no man of our tribe know of this," he said harshly to his companion, and the other nodded, moving off to disappear in the nearby forest. "My father is mad," the young brave said, and gave way to thought the most gloomy. "Mad!"

His parent was drunk, as he was every day of his life when he could come at sufficient strongwater to reach that much desired state. Since the Chief of the Missassagas had turned aside from the sober pathway of his ancestors, Manitou had frowned on his people. They had fallen from an ancient glory through his folly, but had been keen to follow his example of foolishness. Though nominally allies of the French, they were but slaves kept closely under surveillance; a handful of beggars whining for a doled-out ration. The resulting ruin, bitterly hateful to a young man longing for the red glory, once his people's only ambition and delight.

All these things he knew and suffered. Knew his father would have sold a perjured soul, had such a wretched thing a fraction of value, for one taste of a well-loved ruin. Knew his tribe were enslaved by drink, but he dared not murmur. Compelled by tribal custom to obey his father, in turn ordered by him implicitly to obey a hated master, his lot seemed of the hardest. With no possibility of betterment. Bitterly he detested the Frenchmen, though forced to render sullen obedience, the only means at his command whereby some remnant of a people might be saved from utter extinction. For their hereditary foes, the savage Iroquois, slaughtered the Missassagas as they did forest game, whenever — wherever they were to be found without the protection of their French allies.

And Senascot, silent as a bronze statue beneath a hot September sun, pondered bitterly these matters. Angered beyond speech at the drunken doings of a father, he was in no mind to have thrust on his company a more drunken stranger. "He shall taste fire," he muttered, "if he think to supply strongwater to an old man." He ground his teeth, swearing by all the gods he knew — and they were many, but not illustrious — a hundred thousand torments should gnaw this white man, did he pursue such purpose. "The French I must obey," he added fiercely; "but does this drunken dog dare supply my father liquor, he shall die!"

"Does Senascot love the sun so dearly, he burns his body in its fire?" a gentle voice said at his ear, and he turned, startled from accustomed stolidity.

"Rose of the Hills," he exclaimed sharply. "Whence come you?" Before him stood a slender form, just budding into womanhood, her dusky features lovely to his admiring gaze. "Whence come you, maiden?" he repeated, and the raven head drooped low.

"From the tepee," she answered meekly.

"From the tepee of my father? What did you there?" he asked harshly, a burning glance centered on her trembling figure.

"I sought speech of him — and — and, when the stranger was carried in, hid myself. Then they sought sleep, and I — I tended them —"

"That was wrong," he hissed fiercely. "My father would be alone when the Evil One clouds his eyes."

"Even so, Senascot, but the stranger — needed attention; he — he seized my hand, and I — I —" She hesitated, with heaving bosom, and her companion came close.

"And so?" he snarled. "Then?" Jealously he looked on this girl who was his promised wife. That one of his tribe should receive attention at her hands, a sore affront to his dignity as a chief's son. But that this drunken wretch should be tended by her — beyond all bearing. "And so," he hissed, grasping roughly her slender arm.

"And I dared not disturb his hold," she gasped. "I feared Wabacommegat —"

"What of him?" a harsh voice thundered, as the man they spoke of stepped out, his reddened eyes glancing from one to the other. "What of him?" he demanded again, as both waited silent.

Rose of the Hills stood shaking with fear at having disturbed the old man's slumber. Senascot remained in an attitude of tense-muscled strain. He feared the force of a father's displeasure would fall on an innocent victim.

"Speak!" shouted Wabacommegat, rage gaining in violence from their silence. "What does a maid within my lodge, when I would be alone?" And the son hastened to turn the river of displeasure on his own more hardy head.

"The maid but sought my side —" he began hastily.

"Liar! Liar!" shrieked his father. With one stride he moved on the girl, to beat her bruised and senseless to the ground. "Lie there," he snarled. "I will teach you to play spy on me." With a savage glance at Senascot he reëntered the tepee, jerking down the cover with a shaking hand.

A mad passion of rebellion raged in the son's mind. The girl he worshiped lay bleeding from the nostrils. For a moment thoughts of thrashing a father entered his head. Then he stooped, gathered the girl to his broad chest, and carrying her to a near-by tepee, tenderly placed his senseless burden on a heap of skins. No sound escaped his lips. Second, calm thought told him the girl had done amiss and must bear punishment. Though his heart hammered hard beneath a buckskin shirt, he knew himself powerless to avenge the wrong done to her. But his venom increased at the drunken stranger who, he was assured, had been the cause of that sudden furious blow given by a half sober father. He set his jaws hard. The latter must be obeyed, but the former should receive attention — bitter attention — later.

When the stumbling Chief of the Missassagas entered his tepee for the second time that day, he discovered a guest sitting erect on the ground, staring about in evident bewilderment. "White man sober now?" he questioned in broken French. "Where strongwater?" And Francis Birnon, but half awake, his senses all astray in the gloom of the wretched tent, made no reply. "Where strongwater?" demanded the old man, mistaking silence for fear. "Speak!" he said, laying one rough hand on the other's shoulder.

Without warning, he measured his length on the dirt, to stare upward to a menacing pair of gleaming eyes.

"So, you dirty brute, you would lay hands on me, eh?" Birnon said. "In a tight corner, I may be, but two may play at blows, old man. Get up!" he commanded, emphasizing his order with a heavy foot, and the Chief struggled to his feet. "Now, where am I? Haste, I will not lose time with such as you."

Wabacommegat breathed heavily. The insult to his person was beyond belief. None had ever laid hands on him and lived to boast of it. Under his breath he cursed his companion; swore to have his scalp. But he must be wary. This stranger possessed strength, and possibly might be made to furnish

strongwater, ere he died a death of torment.

Francis Birnon, waiting anxiously, his whole mind occupied with thoughts of escape, knew himself in great danger. All his papers were at the bottom of the lake, keeping company with his two Iroquois guides. He suspected Fort Toronto must be close at hand, but to face the commander of that or any such French outpost, without papers of identity, was to invite speedy disaster. His clothes, of British pattern, evidence sufficient to bring his neck within the compass of a swift rope.

"Am I to wait all day?" he asked threateningly, and his companion, with a surly growl, that bared all his yellow teeth, answered:

"In the tepee of Wabacommegat, who found you drunk upon the lake shore," he snarled in fairly good French. Then he added, all thought of insult washed out by a mad desire for drink, "Where strongwater? You have?"

He snatched eagerly at the proffered flask, and Birnon watched the liquor disappear. "So, 'tis both blood and brandy you desire. I fear your capacity for the latter is greater than my slim store, but I doubt your desire for the first can be exceeded."

"Good! stranger, my friend," came the leering reply, followed by, "Where more?" But the other only smiled.

"One thing at a time," he said. "Tell me, how far lies Fort Oswego?"

"Fort Toronto much nearer," with a most suspicious look, "you British?"

"Nay, not by birth, but inclined to sympathize with them, though such distinction passes your befuddled wits, I fear."

"Why you come? What for?"

"That is my own business. How to get me across the lake concerns you more closely."

"White man stay. Bring strongwater."

"I will supply enough to drown you and all your tribe, do you set me over the great water."

"Bring strongwater," insisted the old man, and Birnon lost patience with the drunken obstinate, demanding impossible things.

"How may I provide that here?" he said impatiently. He knew this dissolute sot could not be far from his masters. He suspected Fort Toronto close at hand, and he had heard of its

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commander as a zealot in the cause of his country. To fall into the clutches of such a man would mean instant imprisonment. Perhaps immediate death. All white men traveling within the bounds of New France, unless they were able to produce papers proving they were militia men, or certificates from the officer of their district, that they traveled on legitimate private business, must possess a license to trade. And the young man did not for a moment underestimate the gravity of his present position. Papers, he had none; his journey, one liable to arouse suspicion, for he came to spy out a man, but not to spy out the country. "How may I procure strongwater in this place?" he said angrily, thinking his companion but played for time, while possibly a messenger hurried to acquaint the Fort of his own presence. "How may I find liquor here?" he said again, and a cunning leer crept into the eyes of the old man.

"We go to Fort. Frenchmen find strongwater — for you," he snarled, and Birnon became alert.

"So, you would sell me?" he said sharply. "My life for liquor. Your appetite against my freedom."

As the words left his lips he leaped on the unsuspecting Chief, seized his throat, to bear him, fighting, kicking, struggling with the strength of a madman, backward to the dirt. Twisting his thumbs deep into the knotted flesh, Birnon choked his companion almost black in the face. Then he leaped to his feet and listened. "A close shave," he muttered, jerking a leather thong from its pole, to bind the still figure hand and foot. His heart thumped loud, as again he strained every nerve to listen for some sound outside. "Now to be away."

He stole on tiptoe to the tepee covering. Raised the flap with cautious hand, to drop it as quickly as he picked up its corner. Two moccasined feet stood immovably planted at the curved edge. With a sharp indrawing of his breath, he hurried to the rear of the tent, thinking to slit the cover and depart that way unobserved.

Suddenly, as he waited, a rasping struck his ears, and he turned with arrow speed. A gleam of sunlight shot in through a rent, dazzling his gaze for the minute. A pair of gleaming eyes stared ferociously for a bare second. That instant the tepee fell bodily on him, and he fell, smothered in the clinging, clammy folds.

"'Tis to be my grave after all," he muttered. Then his

mouth was stopped, the breath near driven from his body. Numberless sinewy arms rolled him over and over, helpless, unable to move one muscle, nigh smothered in the evil-smelling, ill-tanned skins of the painted tepee cover.

CHAPTER III

FRENCH HOSPITALITY

WITHIN a gloomy building set apart as the guard house of Fort Toronto, Captain de Celeron sat at a rough table of dressed slabs. A writing case of red leather lay before him. At his elbow stood a silver drinking cup with a dusty bottle, from which he liberally helped himself at by no means long intervals. He sat scowling at the storekeeper standing on the other side of the table, silent, his features white with anger.

"I am waiting, McLeod," he snapped, nibbling a quill pen. "For the second time I ask you what you know of this man." But the other shook his head stubbornly, and his silence confirmed the suspicions of his officer — the unknown must be a spy. "Well, what of him?"

"What would you have me say? Lie to you?" the storekeeper blazed out angrily. "My daughter went to bathe, discovered a man, returned to acquaint me, and the rest you saw with your own eyes."

"But I did not see the man," snapped his officer, and again silence fell on the room, bitter with a new-born hate. "Where is he?"

McLeod shook his head angrily, glancing up at the low beams, and his eyes fell, to wander about the apartment.

The place was bare, dark almost, for the sunlight found difficulty in creeping through the tiny horn panes. The tossed blankets of a skin couch in one corner, the wide chimney-place with its ashy yawn, added a most uncomfortable air to the rude lodging. The only ornaments, a pair of dueling pistols hanging on the mud-chinked wall, with a miniature of a lady. The latter evidently a remembrance of former better times, that seemed altogether out of place in this rude spot.

The storekeeper shrugged at the portrait. Scowled as he glanced at the young man silent at the table. Evidently he connected the two, and his train of thought was not calculated to better his opinion of an officer he thoroughly disliked for an

undesired attention to his only daughter.

"McLeod," snapped Captain de Celeron, "why did you run to his assistance? You must have expected —"

"I repeat, I know naught of him. You are mistaken."

"Your daughter — does she know?"

"You may question her for yourself — I know nothing."

Captain de Celeron banged a heavy fist on the table and the ink spurted over the paper. He rose to his feet, a look of entreaty in his eyes.

"Can you not see our danger?" he asked. "The danger to your daughter, if this man prove a spy."

"Certainly, m'sieu," came the sneer. "I see great danger in any case to one I know of."

The double meaning was not lost. The young man turned white with anger. Came over to stare his companion in the face.

"I understand," he said harshly. "You complain of my attention to Mademoiselle. Listen. I complain of treachery to New France. Which is worse? I know you have cause against me, in that I superseded you here. My superiors, and yours, know you a good man at trade — your record of skins forwarded to Quebec proves that much. But they also know a military man is absolutely necessary here at the moment. It appears so to me indeed, when you refuse to tell me what you know of this cursed spy. Now, once again — what know you of this fellow?"

"I repeat, he was a plain woodsman from his dress. I did not closely examine his body, thinking best to leave trouble alone. It has come fast enough of late. That is all I know."

"Then you force me to place you under arrest, until I may communicate with Fort Niagara, and —"

"If you placed me in hell, I could tell you no more," blazed McLeod. "Why should I, with a daughter, do aught against the safety of our only home? Why should I injure this place, a spot I commanded when you were at dame school? Answer me those questions, if you can, with any show of reason, Captain de Celeron."

He folded his arms across a broad chest to stare at his tormentor, occupied with solution of those very statements. Why should an honest man turn traitor? He had been the trusted guardian of the Fort for years, his books balanced to a centime;

what reason could one so honest find for a late treachery?

Then an inspiration crept into the mind of Captain de Celeron. He smiled. At last he had it. The man was angry at his supersession.

"McLeod," he said coldly, "your daughter may speak."

The storekeeper started as though pricked deep with a knife.

"Your word is law, here," he replied sullenly. "I think you go too far."

"No loyal servant may go too far in the pursuit of treachery."

"None save a fool would suspect an honest man, twice his age," snapped the other, and Captain de Celeron colored to the roots of his hair.

"I will see what I may do to assist her tongue," he said hastily. "If you will remain silent, she can be made to speak."

"As I have said, you may go too far,"— McLeod got that far coolly, then his anger burst bounds, and he leaned down to stare with a deadly menace, straight into the eyes regarding his excitement with much curiosity. "You are in authority here," he hissed savagely, "but by all the devils in hell, do you harm my daughter, by one word, look or action, I will have your life to pay for such work. So, remember." Then he stepped back, to fold his arms, waiting what the other would do, at this act of open warfare.

Captain de Celeron flushed at the threat. Then he banged upon the table with his fist, curtly ordered the soldier who answered the noisy summons to command Mademoiselle McLeod to attend at once, and leaned back in his chair to also wait.

"She shall answer for you," he snapped out, and McLeod inwardly raged with fury.

That this indignity of arrest should be placed upon his innocent girl near drove him mad. This boy commander, this insolent aristocrat, to insult his daughter! Some day, if there was justice in the land, he should pay dearly for such work. Then, as he stood, a thought flashed across his mind. Possibly, she would refuse to come. Not one soldier would lay hands upon her. Every man was her sworn slave, even to the grizzled sergeant. A smile flickered on his lips as he hoped she would positively refuse the order.

Suddenly his smile departed. Another train of thought

entered his head. Had his girl some unknown object in view? Was she interested in the disappearance of this stranger? Was he a messenger, or worse still — a lover? Then he almost laughed. There was no man worth the paring of her thumb nail, he thought. Visitors to the Fort were rare as diamonds. Those that came never dreamed of raising their eyes to her level. And as he stood he laughed out loud with relief, and Captain de Celeron came to his side.

"You laugh," he said with a sneer. "'Tis no pleasant matter, imprisonment, and 'The Pit,' is bad — very bad, I hear."

"The Pit" at Fort Toronto was a narrow cellar dug deep in the earth, and used as a prison for those disobedients resident within its confines. No ray of light entered its reeking depths, once the heavy trapdoor — the only entrance — was flung down. Confinement there effected salutary reformation of the most hardened offender, and as a consequence, better-behaved soldiers were not to be found within the realms of New France, than the fifteen serving her at Fort Toronto.

Captain de Celeron sneered. His contemptuous glance took in the burly figure, and as he thought of the misery to be endured in close cramped quarters he laughed. Now was his chance, he thought. The girl would be unprotected. He — A sudden interruption put to an end his pleasing thought.

The door was thrown wide to admit a girl, followed by a soldier, who seemed anything but pleased at a late occupation. With a silent salute he hastened from the room, and once outside, ventured a shower of muttered curses, directed at an officer who would molest a woman.

She, after hesitating a moment, hurried to her father, to be clasped close in two strong arms. Then, with crimson features, she turned to face Captain de Celeron, sitting staring, nervously toying with a quill pen.

He remained silent many long minutes, drinking in her beauty with longing eyes. Why was it, he thought, this girl-woman should so distract his senses? Then, would she ever be his? Her kisses be given of her own free will? Would she ever respond to the caresses he ardently desired to place on her red lips? Or — and the thought was hateful — would force be necessary to secure their fresh delight?

He had known court beauty. Not an ignorant clod was he. The Court at Paris had not left him untutored, but not

one bedizened lady of fashion had caused him one hour of thought. Yet, here he was to his amazement at the feet of a forest girl, without fortune to gild a lack of birth and soften a rustic manner! And he, the descendant of illustrious ancestors, who would all turn in their stone beds at thought of his marriage to such a common person! He scowled, silent. A marriage ring, he knew, would be but a trifle for such a glorious face and figure. Yet the thought was bitter. She, a nobody, would have none of him. And that knowledge steeled him to his intended purpose.

"Mademoiselle," he said sharply, "I am forced to command your presence, that I may discover some necessary information, refused by your father. Who was this stranger you discovered on the beach?"

"I know naught of him," she said passionately. "Naught, save he was a poor unfortunate, well nigh dead. What right have you to drag me here, to answer needless, foolish questions?"

The father vented a sly chuckle at her answer, that maddened the young officer to extremity. Leaping to his feet, he glared on both, and she shrank back, frightened at the expression on his crimson features.

"Mademoiselle," he shouted, "I will be answered with respect. Impertinence from you, though you be a lady, will not prevent me obtaining knowledge of this man you and your father seek to hide. As an officer of New France I demand from you all you know of him."

"I seek to hide no man," she replied hotly, with flashing eyes. "The bare suggestion is an insult to both of us. As for New France, she will be the better served when gentlemen are employed in her service."

Captain de Celeron flushed red as the sunrise before a storm. Biting his lip, he seated himself, regretting a hasty speech, bringing her reproaches on his head.

"Possibly the gentleman will place you in prison, Madeline," McLeod sneered. "He has threatened me with that."

"For what?" she demanded, her bosom heaving with fear. "Prison!"

"Aye, he goes there an he mends not his manners," snapped the young fellow. With a wicked smile, "You and I would enjoy the society of each other, Mademoiselle, in his absence."

She clasped her hands together in earnest entreaty.

"You would not dare," she exclaimed. "Could not be so cruel. What would you gain by such a dreadful action?"

"Your company," he sneered. "Possibly you might —"

"Never," she said haughtily. "Never would I listen to a man, the jailer of my father." Then seeing determination in his face, for he thought he had gained a point, "What can my poor father know of this man? He has never even set eyes on him. I swear by all the Saints," she ended passionately.

"Then tell me what you know of him, Mademoiselle," he answered brutally. "You know more than you should, or —"

The sound of shuffling feet, the noise of furious yelling from Indian throats, interrupted the speaker, and he rose, waiting. As he stood, the door was thrust wide. A mob of many savages burst into the room, a white man in their midst, while a soldier brandishing a musket strove to stem the tide of struggling humanity. He was powerless to prevent their entry, and contented himself with a glance at his officer, taking up a position at his side.

The prisoner was half naked. His buckskin shirt ripped and torn, his arms were drawn cruelly behind his back, and the strip of hide thrust into his mouth permitted streaks of mingled blood and foam to trickle down either side of jaws forced half open by the gag. Commanding silence, a satisfied smile upon his lips, Captain de Celeron observed McLeod repress a start of alarm. The girl remained unmoved, save that her fair cheeks lost their charm of color.

"You have each seen the other before," he said, and as McLeod scowled, "loose the gag. Now, I repeat, you men have each seen the other before. Where? What for? I demand to know in the name of New France."

The prisoner cast an anxious glance at his captor, allowed his eyes to rest on the face of the girl regarding his condition with evident pity; turned to empty his mouth of blood and tried to speak clearly.

"Monsieur," he answered hoarsely, "I do not remember the acquaintance of this good gentleman." Here he bowed low to McLeod, who flushed uneasily, but made no other sign.

"I say you two have met before. Where, and for what purpose?"

Captain de Celeron was purposefully rough in manner; in-

tentionally rude in speech. He had been quick to note the smile of appreciation on the lips of the girl he adored. Her sympathy was evidently in favor of the prisoner. He savaged his lips because of her presence, repressing a desire to use harsher language, but his brow grew black as the stranger replied, perfectly cool and collected.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said shortly; "I repeat, this good gentleman is unknown to me. Do you doubt my word, I shall be honored to argue the matter — later, that is —" he hesitated, bowing to the girl,— "when Mademoiselle is absent."

"Silence you," thundered the young officer, laying one hand on his tasseled sword hilt. "Silence!" and the other raised his eyebrows with a shrug of broad shoulders.

"As you say now, monsieur," he said coldly. "Doubtless we shall meet alone, and I may find opportunity to correct your bad manners."

"Six feet of rope may prevent the lesson," came the grim retort. "Of that, later. Now, answer me, sirrah. What were you about upon the beach this morning?"

"Seeking immediate departure from this place, and the minding of my own private affairs, I do assure you."

McLeod chuckled quietly at the answer. Captain de Celeron found more fuel for the fury of his blazing wrath at the jeer. His face reddened as he seized a quill and prepared to write.

"Senascot," he snapped out, "where was this man? How came he to fall into the hands of the Missassaga?" He had caught sight of the young man foremost in the band, and though their chief, Wabacommegat, was at his elbow, he preferred to question the son. The latter was more to be trusted than the father. At least he never drank, supplied the Fort with game at moderate charges, lied no more frequently than was to be expected from a savage whose parent was a most notorious offender in that respect. "Where was he found?" he asked again, and Senascot pressed eagerly forward.

"In the tepee of my father," he replied harshly. "There we found him. He had bound our chief. Stolen his property. We bound him, bringing him to our allies, the French."

Madeline, clinging to her father's arm, sighed with relief. How foolish she had been, she thought. Of course the Missassagas had found her stranger. Now matters would soon be set straight. A pleased smile stole to her red lips.

"Continue, brother," Captain de Celeron said, hastily ending the writing of the answer. "Continue; you shall be well rewarded for such diligence."

"Senascot heard this spy speak cunning words. He offered much strongwater, if knowledge of the Fort was given —"

"Liar," the prisoner interrupted calmly. "I made no such offer."

"Silence, you. Thrust a gag in his mouth, an he interfere again. Proceed, Senascot," and the young brave glared evilly.

"Then we bound him as I have said. Brought him hither. We know him for a spy."

"I am no spy," Birnon said hastily. "I demand to be heard. This lying villain —" The sentence ended in a babble of sound, for the young brave, at a nod from Captain de Celeron, snatched a knife from his girdle to thrust the gleaming steel broadways into the mouth of the speaker. The keen edge bit deep into tender flesh, as the thongs were tightly drawn and knotted.

Madeline screamed. Quickly hid her face on the shoulder of her father to shut out the horrid sight of blood. Her father stepped forward, hesitated, remembering his daughter, to hold her closely.

"Gently, Madeline," he whispered. "Gently, dear, I fear we can do little for him — or any like us now." Then he immediately regretted his thoughtless words, for she clung to him in a very passion of weeping, as he caressed her hair, whispering again, "Quiet, dear, you but make matters the worse."

Captain de Celeron, alarmed by her cries, came over to them.

"I had forgotten Mademoiselle," he said abruptly. "Take her away. But remember, McLeod, see you make no attempt to leave this place." And as abruptly he returned to his chair, motioning Senascot to his side.

The storekeeper glared his contempt of the speaker. He dared not trust his lips with further speech. He moved from the room, leading the girl, blind with tears, but as she passed the prisoner she took courage to smile at him, and he made her a very low bow. He read interest, pity, sympathy, in her brief glance and realized he was not absolutely without one friend. Then the door opened, closed behind them, and he once more faced his captor, biting the end of his quill with vicious teeth.

Captain de Celeron had observed the two. That pitying

upward glance was full confirmation of his suspicions. He was certain now that the three were in league. That a dark plot, well laid and ready to be sprung, had been nipped in the very bud by the capture of this stranger. Hatred of this fellow, this spy, whose bloody features gained him sympathy, sprang into life. He might have had one chance as a spy. As a rival, absolutely none.

"Continue, Senascot," he said to the young brave, who waited with an evil scowl on his swarthy features. And as he heard, his quill rasped at express speed over the paper. Not that writing was so necessary, but he desired to impress on his commanding officer at Niagara his zeal for the welfare of the outpost under his command. "Your mark, Senascot, to this account," he said, then threw down the pen, sitting back with a satisfied air as the young brave laboriously scratched a cross on the precise statement. "The prisoner has been searched?" he snapped. "No. Then strip him."

A dozen willing hands reached out to the helpless man. He knew he must be eventually overpowered by sheer weight of numbers. Though his mouth caused him an exquisite agony, he determined that when they loosed his bonds, untied his hands, then — The thought gave him some pleasure. He would show this yelping crew a white man's strength.

Speedily he was undeceived. As quickly tripped from behind and flung upon the floor. One arm was loosed from the thongs, but held by a dozen clutching hands. A ripping sound, and his garments fell away, seam by seam from his sorely bruised body. His captors cut one thong to as speedily replace another about his bare flesh. He fought like a madman against such degrading treatment, but in a very few minutes he lay helpless, naked as the day he entered the world, save for the leather thongs cutting like steel whips into the skin of his smarting flesh.

He muttered a prayer that the fringe of his buckskin trousers might escape the eyes of his brutal captors. Sewn in the beaded edge of those garments was concealed a strip of parchment whose loss would mean the complete frustration of his journey. That is, if he escaped his tormentors. He strained his ears to catch the sound of its discovery. Uttered a sigh of deep relief as he heard the officer speak in a most disappointed voice.

"'Twould be his death warrant, the carrying of treasonable

papers," he muttered angrily. Then savagely, "Place his clothes on him, and throw him in the 'Pit.' I will despatch news of his capture to Niagara, and wait for a hangman to tie his last cravat. Away with him! I say."

Birnon sighed again with very thankfulness as he was lifted from the floor, and his garments thrust on him by ungentle hands. At least he was alive, he thought. Surely something must come to pass ere the messenger returned. The girl would — Then he became incapable of thought. Roughly they dragged him from the building; forced his feet across a space of ankle-deep sand; opened a heavy trap door and flung him headlong into a reeking black hole. The trap thundered over his half-stunned head, and he knew Stygian darkness, hiding hope, light and shutting out all possibility of escape from the brutes who yelled and capered above his aching head.

CHAPTER IV

MAIDEN METHODS

WHEN Madeline with her father reached the privacy of their lodging at the rear of the storehouse, she threw herself down on a thong-laced couch to shut out the sight of bloody drops trickling down a chin near smooth as her own. Could she ever forget that scene of brutality? Would the poor, ill-used stranger think her savage as his French captors? What brutes some men were she thought and sobbed quietly.

"My dear," her father said anxiously, "weeping will do him little good; I must think out some plan of assistance." And she raised her head eagerly, wondering at the sudden interest betrayed by her rough-spoken father, in the man he had once considered better off dead.

"You spoke of ropes for him," she said almost angrily. "And now that he lies cruelly wounded you wish to aid him."

McLeod swore softly under his breath. Hastily he paced the floor, his bushy eyebrows drawn close over blazing eyes. "I did," he said harshly, "and with good reason, as you see. Would he not better be in his grave than at the mercy of such as De Celeron? I would that Sergeant Pere returned from Niagara. He might do something — but what?" And he fell to a steady tramping, the silence broken only by the sounds of low weeping coming from his daughter.

The log-walled lodging, with the sun streaming in at the narrow casement, presented a most cheerful air. Everywhere lay traces of a woman's handiwork. In the stuff hangings at the window; in the gleaming copper pots and pans ranged in orderly rows beneath the wide dresser occupying one whole side of the room; in the neat arrangement of the few — exceeding few — fanciful china dishes set out tastefully on the shining oak dresser-top, and the adze-smoothed floor, even, covered with glossy skins, not forgotten in a maid's well-ordered idea of neatness. And she, who had rarely known sorrow, lay sobbing bitterly at the ill treatment of a man who was to her at least, a complete stranger.

"And he will die?" she asked after a long silence.

"Yes," came the abrupt reply. "Of a certainty he will — now." He was thinking of that sympathetic smile given in the guardhouse, and the glare in the eyes of his officer. "Yes," he said again, and she rose hurriedly.

"You do not believe Captain de Celeron will murder him? I will to him at once — beg of him to give the poor man — one chance."

"Murder! 'tis a harsh word, my child, but I would have you remember this officer of ours permits no one to stand in his path. Have you forgotten this morning? He will hang this stranger for a spy, if for no other reason." And she blushed rose red.

"He is bad," she exclaimed angrily. "You know it, I know it and Sergeant Pere knows it too, though of course he cannot say so. He says he loves me." She stamped her foot viciously. "I hate him! Detest him — and I would have done so much for him."

Her father understood. He knew whom she wished to aid. In his heart he was not sorry her interest was centered on the stranger. Even yet, he hoped that some chance would arise to give him freedom. That to himself, however. He would wait, to see how matters turned out. In his heart he wished she had been of more common mold; that her figure lacked its present beauty. For women were scarce in the land, and men of Captain de Celeron's breed were capable of many things to attain such perfection.

"All we may do is to wait the coming of the Sergeant. He may do something — and —" He ended with, "he is a very pig for obstinacy at times."

"He will do anything for me," she answered, then fell silent, staring out of the window.

Often had she dreamed of someone strangely like the prisoner. More often, when assisting her father to inscribe in the huge tomes sent from Quebec bare records of business transactions, of stores expended for furs carried on broad backs over mile-long rough trails, had fancy conjured some fair prince scanning the neat lines, to think of the writer hidden deep within the leagues of northern forest. And he had arrived at last! Out of the nowhere had he come, to be brutally misused by her own people!

She shuddered as she thought. His future looked dark indeed, and she had scarce a word with him. His complete helplessness painted a tragic picture to her youthful mind. One shaded by the dull colors of grief, etched in with darker shades of cruelty. And her tears flowed the faster, while her father bent down to stroke her glossy hair.

"I would not have you weep so bitterly for a stranger," he said.

"He does not seem strange to me," she whispered.

"Nor to me," came the quiet reply, and the girl started.

"You know him, father?" she asked, but he rose quickly, his eyes set in a steady stare, that changed to one of wonder.

"De Celeron will have his hands full an he keep up that display," he muttered, leaning forward to peer cautiously out of the window.

On the narrow platform running round inside the stockade walls, sentries paced their posts. Copper glints flashed from the muskets they carried, and the storekeeper counting carefully numbered every man of the garrison on duty.

"What does it mean?" Madeline asked. "Indians?"

"Aye, our little Captain fears the stranger to be their advance guard. I would our Sergeant came." Then he added almost under his breath, "He might do something for the youngster. Poor Birnon." And his daughter caught the name.

"Birnon, is that his name?" she said. "You do know him," and the man abruptly turned, his weather-beaten features flushed, his hand trembling violently, as his fingers sought for and crushed one of her soft hands.

"Madeline," he answered hoarsely, "if he be the man I think, his father and I were close friends in the old days. Years gone I knew him well. Years — long years gone." And a scalding tear trickled down his cheek. The well of memory was full to overflowing.

"Poor father," she said softly. "We must assist him then for old times' sake." And the thought that her only parent possessed knowledge of her stranger was wonderfully cheering to her mood of sadness.

"Aye, child, but we have a difficult task. See — see where De Celeron places him." He pointed out to the stockaded inclosure.

"That such a man should disgrace the uniform of New

France," she gasped, for she caught sight of a wounded man dragged unresisting across the dusty space, his feet trailing miserably, and again her face sought the shelter of her father's rough coat. "Oh, the coward," she whispered, but the man said nothing.

His keen eyes noted Wabacommegat foremost of the mob. Noted also that when his band were without the gate, the Chief remained, to seat himself on the four-inch trap-door, above the prisoner, and knowing well the absolute laziness of the man, wondered why he should have taken on his shoulders even the slight task of guarding a wounded man condemned to death.

"I do not understand," he muttered. Knowing nothing of the rough handling Birnon had given his jailer, he was amazed. But Wabacommegat waited for vengeance. Blood was needed to wash out the insult to his powerful person as Chief of the Tribe of the Crane. He promised himself a pleasure indeed. His jeers as a jailer, in the ears of a spy, blinking in the sunlight, was something well worth the trouble of waiting for. But the storekeeper, unaware of the morning events, could only mutter, "I do not understand," and his daughter shared his wonder.

"I wonder would he assist us?" she asked slowly.

"We might give him strongwater and so perhaps effect an escape, but near a barrel would be needed."

"Rose of the Hills is to marry Senascot. She loves me — perhaps might persuade her lover to help."

"The man she is to wed hates the storekeeper as much as his father loves the storekeeper's strongwater. Senascot would not permit her to assist us." And the father shook his head. Plainly he saw no help in that direction. "We must wait for the Sergeant."

"She might do much for me, she says she loves me dearly," the girl persisted, for it was the only plan she could think on, and her heart was eager to help the man she had discovered on the beach. "Suppose I try?"

"If you will you must," her father said. "You may do something. 'Twill be better than waiting." And he rose to enter the storehouse, while his daughter ran lightly out towards the "Pit."

"Wabacommegat," she said, in the half-French, half-Missassaga dialect, "where is Rose of the Hills?" But the old

man gave a surly grunt. He disliked the familiarity of this white woman.

"In her lodge. What white maid want?"

"I need her," Madeline replied bravely, though the leer in his eyes frightened her.

"Ma'amselle needs assistance," a heavy voice boomed at her shoulder. With a gasp of relief she turned, to come face to face with her old friend, Sergeant Pere. "Name of a fish," he said sourly, "but you choose strange aid."

"Oh, Sergeant, I thought you away at Niagara. When did you return? But now you have come, all will be well. Oh, I am so delighted," she said all in a breath, and the soldier beamed his appreciation, while the girl stood considering how she should best put the matter near her heart.

Sergeant Pere, the sub-officer at Fort Toronto, was of uncertain age, but all knew him to be lank of form, and somewhat round shouldered. Some of his enemies — and he had more than his share — said sixty, even hinted at seventy years having passed over his iron-gray head. But the wide sword-belt about his wasp-like waist, his gleaming side arms and spotless attire, betrayed the military dandy, defying the ravages of time. True, his face was slashed from temple to jaw with a purple scar, that gave him a most ferocious appearance at first acquaintance, but the merry eyes gleaming youthfully out from bushy eyebrows had always a smile for the girl who stood thinking how best to approach him, and gain his interest to her stranger. Rose of the Hills was forgotten. The Sergeant, if he would, could do much better.

"I am waiting, ma'amselle," he said. "Is it an errand to gather flowers, or some such desperate venture?" Then he suddenly scowled, for the sentries to a man had stopped to stare. "Name of a fish," he shouted, "can I not hold converse with a lady, but every pig-dog of you must stop to regard me?"

Madeline smiled. Each soldier resumed his steady pacing, utterly oblivious to all things save duty, and taking courage, she whispered, "Sergeant, I am loth to trouble you, but — the stranger — he will receive attention?" To her intense surprise, he stiffened visibly; his features took on a blank stare, and his head became if possible more erect upon his shoulders.

"I have no knowledge of such a man within these walls,"

he said coldly, and the girl flushed at what she knew was a deliberate falsehood.

"Mademoiselle would do well to appeal to me," a voice said at her ear, and she understood the lie of her abject slave.

"Captain de Celeron —" she commenced hotly, then hesitated. What was to be gained by openly defying the man? The only possible way to gain assistance for the captive was to cultivate friendship with his captor. An easy task when the latter was only too willing to play guide. The idea was repellent to her gentle soul, yet there seemed no other way to attain a much desired end. With a smile on her lips, but an inward warning to be careful how far she encouraged his attentions, she said softly, "Captain de Celeron, your manner to me — to my father —"

"I know," he replied eagerly, "but pray consider my position, mademoiselle." He came a step closer. She shuddered as his hot breath fanned her white cheek.

"I have thought of that," she murmured.

"And you do forgive me? Madeline, dear."

The bright day grew dark to her as she noted the unwelcome familiarity. The Sergeant coughed doubtfully. He evidently thought his little cabbage wrong. "I — I find it hard to forgive brutality," she murmured, and the face of Captain de Celeron wore a smile. He would dissemble in future, he thought; that is — until his desire was attained. Then the iron beneath the velvet should be shown.

"Brutality," he said softly, as though the word was an offense to his nature. "Brutality, mademoiselle. 'Twas duty. The thought of danger to you made me somewhat harsh. Were I — were any of us to fall into the hands of Indians, we should be treated in worse manner. 'Tis what we soldiers all expect in this savage land, should we be taken by the enemy."

"From savages — yes; from white men, no. This poor fellow was near dead. He is no spy."

"Do *you* desire better treatment for his hurts, he shall receive it," he said eagerly. But the girl could only nod assent. Her brain was swimming with a fear she could not put in words. Her companion smiled at her dismay. "Ho, Sergeant," he said sharply, "remove the gag. Give the man water." Then he waited until his sub was out of hearing. "I

would do much to gain your favor, Madeline," he whispered. "The slightest reward would satisfy me."

"The good God will reward you, monsieur," she murmured faintly. "I may only thank you in the depths of a grateful heart."

"I would much prefer to receive my reward direct from the lips of one of His angels," he commenced passionately, but discovered he spoke to empty space. The girl had gone. Womanlike, having gained her present object, she put off the date of payment to a more convenient season. "Thousand devils," he muttered, "she shall not escape me so easily the second time." Twisting his mustache to needle points, he strode angrily off to his quarters.

With the speed of a hare pursued by a relentless hunter, Madeline raced over the ankle-deep dust. Fear of a detaining hand lent wings to her feet, and she ran into the shelter of her father's arms, clinging to him tightly with little sobs of excitement.

"What is it, child? Iroquois?" he laughed.

"Oh, father, Captain de Celeron, he has promised to care for our stranger."

"Name of all the Saints, and how came he to such a right about face?"

"Well, Wabacommegat would not assist me, and Sergeant Pere chanced by —"

"And wheedling lips beguiled the old one still further into the meshes a saucy tongue daily entwines about willing feet, eh? He asked assistance, yes?"

"Nay, he was angry — at least he made pretense of it, but the Captain —" She hesitated with rosy face. How should she explain to her father the reception given a man he had warned her to hold strictly aloof?

"Well, child, what of him?" he asked, turning her face to the light streaming in through the wide wooden door. "Why hesitate?"

"He was there and — I temporized," she whispered slowly, but her father allowed his hand to fall from her cheek. For a moment he said nothing. Then slowly, and the girl was frightened at his expression, he said,—

"Temporized! Temporized! Ah, my girl, 'tis the first step on the road to hell, the devil makes easy for those women who

are easy led." The eyes of his daughter flashed fire.

"Father!" she exclaimed angrily, "do you think so of me? I hate this officer. Detest him." And she stamped her moccasined foot vehemently on the boards. "What else was I to do? 'Twas the only way to gain assistance for the poor stranger. The only way," she repeated.

"An my little cabbage did well," Sergeant Pere said, striding into the storehouse, his heavy feet resounding to the dusty rafters. "A drink of brandy and charge it to New France, my friend. 'Tis the order of our Captain," he added, noting the stare of surprise on the face of his companions.

"For the prisoner?" Madeline asked eagerly.

"He and no other, little one. You understood, just now." Here he jerked his head sideways. "I dare not do too much when he was on hand to take note of me. I am only sub," he added with a grin.

"Ah, but I am more than satisfied he should receive attention at the hands of *my* sub-officer," she said with a winning smile, and the old one winked his appreciation.

"I lack bandages," he said; and as the girl flew to obtain what he desired, he continued, "We were not better served at Brest, where we had abundance of material necessary to the conduct of honorable warfare." Then curiously, "My little cabbage is a friend of the prisoner?" For he was greatly perplexed. He failed to interpret aright the sudden interest of his little one in a stranger, seen for the first and only time that day.

Madeline blushed rosily, and her father came to the rescue. "No," he said slowly, "but his father was my good friend. Long ago." Sergeant Pere laughed heartily.

"Now I comprehend," he said with deep approval. "He is the fiancé of mademoiselle. Ah! now I see. 'Tis well." Placing a finger to one side of his nose, he whispered confidentially, "May I bear a message?" And as the girl stood frozen, gazing up to the grinning features of her adoring slave, he continued impressively, "Name of a fish, little one, 'tis naught to be ashamed of. We all have loved. Why, when I was at Brest, under Dieskau the German, I— Tut, tut, we all have our little secrets, eh?" and he winked a volume of confidences at the storekeeper, leaning against the counter, as much if not more amazed than his stupefied daughter, at the

complete misunderstanding of the old man.

He at last felt himself aggrieved at the silence of his two best friends. They to keep a secret from him. Ah, he was as wise as they, even though the flavor of youth had long departed from his bones. Knowingly he came close to whisper.

"'Tis to be hidden from our Captain. I understand, but why from me? He desires you for himself. I have seen, and shall be silent until I am to be trusted." Then he winked hard to hide his displeasure.

"Sergeant — you — Oh, I do trust you — but —" Madeline began, hastily attempting to explain, but the old man was more than satisfied with her confidence.

"Name of a fish, of course you do, little one. You love him and would say more were you certain of me." He rattled on to hide the confusion of the girl, and as he strode outside ended, "Trust me, my cabbage. I will convey to him all that a maid may desire to say to her future husband. Trust me, child. I will say enough." And he was gone.

Madeline ran to her father, hiding her face on his shoulder. One fearful glance she caught of his features, but he seemed not at all angry. He seemed rather to have arrived at the solution of a very difficult problem.

"What will he say?" she murmured, and her father answered very gently:

"My dear, we cannot help what he may say or think. This matter is in the hands of God." Under his breath he added, "But Sergeant Pere intends to have his way. I wonder what will be the outcome?"

CHAPTER V

THE SERGEANT ALSO DISCOVERS A MAN

"NAME of a fish, but the child is fearful of offending her future lord and master," Sergeant Pere muttered, as he hastened toward the "Pit." "He is British. That may account for it. They are soulless heathens, to a man." Then his eyes chanced on Wabacommegat seated on the trap-door. "Out of the way," he muttered wrathfully, while the old Chief longingly eyed the vessel of brandy set carefully on one side. "Out of my road, heathen. A whiff will be your share."

Feeling with careful feet for the rungs of the ladder, he descended to the wet ground, and quickly kindling a torch he carried, stood peering about, distastefully, and with much anger.

"Name of a fish," he muttered, "'tis an evil place to receive company." Then his gaze fell on the prisoner, lying where he had been tumbled into his prison. "I have little doubt he has received scurvy treatment, yet had Dieskau had him, he would long ere this have imitated an acorn dangling from its stalk." He paused to scowl angrily. "And now I, for the sake of a maid, must turn traitor to the training of my youth and assist the enemy. 'Tis not like De Celeron, such brutality."

A few quick slashes of a knife freed the man he came to succor. The gag was tenderly removed, and Francis Birnon sat stiffly upright, spitting the blood from his lacerated mouth. For a moment the old soldier stood silent. Even his hardened soul revolted from such cruelty perpetrated upon one white man by another.

"De Celeron will be hard put to it to explain such conduct an this man go free," he muttered. "What reason has he, I wonder?" Then he had it. Madeline! He would have her for his own. That was the reason, and scowling horribly he shrugged, with, "Oh, these women," under his breath.

Aloud, he said in defense of New France and the uniform he wore, "Name of a million fishes, my brave, 'twas no French-

man tied that gag." But the prisoner made no reply, save to shake his head slowly. That careful movement, exquisite torture. "Never care," rambled on the old one, "I bear a message, comrade, but first, drink this."

The prisoner eagerly seized the brimming bowl, and attempted to swallow the fiery contents. The biting spirit penetrated to every corner of his wounds, cauterizing the slashes, but proving a second agony, hard to bear without complaint. He tried to mumble his gratitude, prevented by his visitor, who, smearing a black ointment upon a strip of cloth, hastily commenced to bandage his torn cheeks.

"Name of a fish, but your appearance will be none the worse," he chuckled, endeavoring by rapid surgical treatment to hide his disgust. "When I was at Brest, under Dieskau the German, many a handsome fellow lost the half of his body, and was thought none the less of by the girls an he had loot in plenty to spend on their greedy persons." He paused in the nice adjustment of a bandage, to add, "If silence be of gold, you will possess many riches for the next few weeks." Then he finished his task, and the pair waited, silently surveying each other by the light of the sputtering torch.

Suddenly the younger man reeled; clutched at the slippery wall to save a fall.

"Leg trouble, eh, my brave?" Sergeant Pere said with a chuckle. "Well, you are not the first to suffer from such complaint. I have known occasions when my own limbs refused duty and my tongue joined in the mutiny against their owner." Here he screwed his lips into the semblance of a smile, to as quickly resume his ordinary expression as though ashamed of his momentary lapse from precise military manner. "Name of a fish, but I forget," he continued, casting his eyes up to the oblong of sunlight overhead; "Ma'amselle sends her love and devotion. Her heart is all your own. Beats only for your sake. Much more she would have told me, but lacked time and opportunity." Then he stood back to note the effect of his message.

Francis Birnon stared undisguised wonderment. What girl was the old fellow speaking of? There was no woman on this side the Atlantic, or on the other for that matter, who cared two straws as to his present predicament. He shook his head to show lack of understanding; surprise in his eyes that asked a

thousand questions for their dumb owner. And his companion grew irritated at the apparent willful denseness.

"Name of a fish," he said angrily, "do I not know all? Has she not assured me? Were I to receive a love message from one so beautiful, I would do better than to stand staring like an idiot." Then the idea that possibly the prisoner was more in need of food than love tokens flashed to mind. With a world of apology in his stiff manner, he said, "Pardon, stranger; 'tis I who am a nameless animal. You doubtless require attention to the inner man." With a doleful shake of the head, "I fear the road to your heart lies through your stomach." For he was somewhat disappointed at the thought of divine love finding entrance through such commonplace passage, and his voice betrayed resentment at the humbling of Cupid.

The younger man hardly understood, but he vigorously nodded his head at the word food. He had eaten nothing since noon of the previous day. This old one was without doubt a trifle mad. Certainly an odd character. But if meat and drink were to be come at through his good will and kindness, it was best to humor him. So he nodded again, pointing to his mouth.

"Ah, that rouses you, does it? For the moment I thought your wits wool gathering, but they are hungered and quick to smell meat. Now, wait. I will see what victuals I may provide for a man who may not open his mouth to receive them."

Sergeant Pere quickly ascended the ladder. He was angry at his forgetfulness to provide food; was about to mutter some further apology, when he noted his companion busily engaged in making sure arms and legs remained sound. With a shrug he departed, muttering to himself at the ingratitude toward a maid.

Sounds of discord, the noise of blows putting haste into lagging feet, rose on the still air, and Francis Birnon, in spite of his captivity, inwardly smiled. "He is a tartar," he thought, and then the open door met his eye. Why should he not ascend? None being at hand to dispute his passage, he climbed the shaky ladder, emerging into the quiet afternoon. Gratefully he exposed his half naked body to the warm sun, drawing deep breaths of the pine-scented air. Then his roving eyes caught sight of a row of log buildings opposite where he sat; their shingled roofs, warped and twisted by the heat of long

years, attracted his attention.

"'Twas within one of those I saw her," he thought, and curiously turned his head.

There, before his eyes, stood the girl of whom he thought, her charming features framed by the vine-wreathed casement at which she waited. At his first sign of recognition, a bow in his best manner — he even had time to note the interest on her smiling face — she disappeared. But a waving window curtain betrayed the fact of her presence.

"Wonderful that a white girl should reside in this desolate spot," he thought. "And the man — he must of course be her father — McLeod, the officer had named him. Strange indeed to discover such beauty here." Then a stranger thought flashed across his mind. "Could this storekeeper, — he must be that from his civilian attire — could he be the man he was in search of? Absurd! That rough old man, with a tangle of iron-gray hair surmounting his massive head, his harsh speech and dictatorial manner, was little like to prove on closer acquaintance even the refined Rene de Laudonniere, he had been taught to expect from the description furnished by his grandfather. Absurd; who could expect a gentleman acting storekeeper to a tiny outpost? But who would have expected to find in this savage waste so gentle and ladylike a person as this very storekeeper's daughter?

Again he shrugged with a frown. 'Twas a confounded nuisance, this being dumb. Yet the bare idea of discovering the benefactor of his grandparent in this outcast place was perfectly ridiculous. He dismissed the subject from his mind, to fall wondering how long his repast would be in coming. And how, in the name of St. Francis, he was to eat when it came?

"Drowned deep in reflection?" a voice said at his elbow, and his old soldier friend returned, balancing a bowl of steaming broth carefully in two hands. "Name of a fish, but you English take pleasure sorrowfully. English you must be indeed, by the folly of your approach to a French fort alone." Then, hurriedly, "'Tis hard to think on a hempen collar with composure, my brave, but I have heard 'tis soon over, so cheer up. Many a better man than either of us two has decorated an oak tree-top."

Francis Birnon coolly shrugged. Rising, he shook his head to show he possessed a purely philosophical mind in matters be-

yond his control. But he thought rebelliously, 'twas hard to be silent when questions concerning his disposal seethed hotly for solution. Then the soft loam at his feet inspired him. Seizing a short stick, he commenced to trace letters on the sand. Surely by this means he could account for his appearance: state exactly why he came and what for!

Sergeant Pere stood quietly by, his twisted lips drawn to a queer smile. "Letters, eh?" he said. "Knowledge and a handsome appearance is sure attraction to a maid, that is — provided the face of the writer be hers to fondle, and the words speak of her own fair features. Otherwise — well, there may be troublous times. Had I the art at Brest, now — ah —" He was rudely interrupted from contemplating his own possible amours, lost through ignorance.

Francis Birnon seized his lapeled coat, eagerly pointing to the ground.

"Nay, stranger," he said sadly, "I am not versed in signs. As a child I was delicate, and could not learn; as a youth I was severely confined to —" He ended with a smothered cough. He was about to trench on private history the better to remain unrelated, possibly best concealed altogether. Remembering himself in the nick of time, he smiled, shook his head in the sorely disappointed writer's face. "Name of a fish, but art not hungry?" he asked to divert the topic. "Be content. They may not hang you until speech be restored — that of course is doubtful, but there is consolation in so thinking. See — here is broth. How in the name of all the fishes in the sea 'tis to pass thy lips passes my poor wits." He shook his head in disappointment. Then he had an idea. "If there was but one quill," he muttered.

His roving eyes chanced on Wabacommegat, seated close at hand, lost to all material things save the burning tobacco in a stone pipe at which he contentedly puffed.

"Ha, to my hand appears the thing needed," he chuckled. With one stride he came close, plucked several feathers from the old man's gaudy head-dress, and unconcernedly commenced to strip them of their plumage. When they were trimmed to his liking, he thrust them into the bowl, and handed it to Birnon. "Drink," he said, and the other, inserting the quills to one side of the bandage, rapidly sucked down the rich contents.

Wabacommegat sat stupefied at the insult to his sacred person. Then he leaped to his feet, raving with rage, menacing the old soldier, who paid not the slightest attention to his motions.

Birnon attempted to mumble some words of gratitude, but was waved grandiloquently away. "Say not a word, stranger," Sergeant Pere said with a motion of one long lean arm. "'Tis naught, such device to feed the wounded. Why, when I was at Brest, under Dieskau the German, we had forty doing the same trick, through smaller feathers than those you put to such good purpose. Forty," he added slowly; "I think 'twas fifty, but will not lie to gain a trifle of ten."

His gaze fell on Wabacommegat, near mad with fury and the pretended ignorance expressed by the old soldier of his whereabouts.

"What ails you, Indian?" he asked scornfully. Without waiting for reply, he coolly turned his back. "These dogs be great dancers," he said with a scowl, pausing to adjust his waistbelt.

Wabacommegat saw his chance of revenge. Quick as the thought impelling the action, he seized his knife, raised the blade high in the air to bring it whistling down to seek the heart of his insulter. Birnon stepped forward as the steel descended; thrust forward his elbow, taking the arm of the would-be murderer in mid-air. The knife hurtled harmlessly through space, and the old Chief sank to the ground, nursing a bruised wrist, muttering horrible imprecations on both men.

Sergeant Pere grinned good humoredly. "Stranger," he said, "I am obliged. 'Tis like these dirty brutes to stick a man with their dirtier skewers when he offends them. I will attend to him." With a long arm he seized Wabacommegat by the back of the neck, and coolly proceeded to place several well-planted kicks upon his anatomy. Two heavy boots were employed with good effect until tiredness compelled the punisher to desist, and at last he released the old Chief, who sank groaning to the ground.

The jeers of the soldiers on the walls, interested spectators to a man, rang loud on the quiet afternoon air. Stung to madness, forgetful of his injuries, the Chief bounded to his feet, ran across the stockade, and before a hand could be raised to prevent his escape, leaped to the platform, scaled the wall and

"DRINK"

vanished. He waited for a moment until the walls were lined with the soldiers, then with a yell of derision he hurried to the leafy forest encroaching within a hundred yards of the Fort.

Sergeant Pere followed slowly to the gateway. "Another enemy to annoy us," he muttered to Birnon standing at his side. "He would have pricked my vanity. Stranger, I am obliged. I am not acquainted with the name, but at least I know a man when I meet one."

Birnon eagerly seized the hand extended. He knew he had found at least one friend within the habitation of his enemies. A sturdy comrade, too, and a brave one; a man who had turned not one single hair when an Indian knife came very near to cutting the slender thread of existence.

"As a French soldier I am bound to obey orders," the old one continued, "but," and here he winked impressively, "I am allowed some discretion in the carrying out of such commands. Wilt give thy parole as one man to another not to escape?" and the other bowed low in elegant manner that won the secret approval of Sergeant Pere. "Ah, good. Come with me to my lodging," he said grandly, as though the pleasures of all Paris were to be found within his poor quarters. "Come. I will find more proper accommodation for a long body and sore bones than are to be found within the 'pit,' which is but an eyesore to my military way of thinking."

As he walked he muttered, "De Celeron may rave an he will — should he discover what I have done, he will do so in any case, but I know a man when I see one, and the Good God alone knows they are scarce enough in this devil's land."

Francis Birnon followed slowly. His mind was filled with gloom. The future seemed so short. He had made one friend, but also a bad enemy in the person of Captain de Celeron. He knew the name, and had overheard his companion's mutterings. However, he was yet alive, and that was something to be thankful for. Something must surely turn up to assist him out of his present difficulty; some friendly hand ward off the disgraceful spy's death. But he was not sure, and rescue seemed many miles distant.

In this frame of mind he strode along, but he would, perhaps, have been more cheerful had he only known a young girl had witnessed his activity. That she had clapped her slim hands when the knife had fallen harmlessly to earth. Also,

that she secretly approved of his courage and personal appearance, scarred though he happened to be at the moment and ragged as any scarecrow flapping its rags in some safe meadow in the old land from whence he came.

CHAPTER VI

HOW CAPTAIN DE CELERON SOUGHT CONSOLATION

THE devil of dull care sat with Captain de Celeron; the spirit of anxiety whispered a thousand fears in his ready ear. Alone in his quarters, he mentally read over the doings of the day.

The appearance of the prisoner troubled him, the stubborn silence of the storekeeper where the former was concerned annoyed him; the interest displayed by the girl he confessed he desired beyond all things toward the same fellow roused a slumbering hate directed against the father, and a vindictive desire to end the life of the younger man.

That the latter was a British spy he had little doubt, though he had offered to explain his presence in French territory. He knew white men without a license to trade would naturally lie to save their necks from the noose accorded to all and sundry without necessary papers to prove identity. And the man's speech and appearance belied the trader. He must be a spy. What else could he be, an Englishman alone within French bounds?

"Thousand devils," he muttered savagely, "'twould perhaps have been wiser to let him speak. That Senascot is at heart a liar, as are all his breed." Then, thinking of the scouts he had despatched to scour the surrounding forest, he added, "I would they returned, yet when they do, 'twill be but to demand strong-water for an unsuccessful search."

Captain de Celeron was a brave man, but he may well be forgiven his doubts. British forces were creeping slowly but surely across the frontier. They had with amazing audacity once succeeded in diverting the trade of the outpost he commanded to their own better supplied Chouegen across the lake. Though that ill-starred spot had been wiped from the earth by French soldiers, custom at Fort Toronto had not been benefited by the slaughter of the garrison and the destruction of a rival trading outpost. At least, to the eyes of the young man, at his first independent command, imperatively ordered to re-

store trade to its former lucrative conditions, the monthly returns forwarded to Niagara showed no increase. Rather a decline in trade.

He rose from his chair to pace the floor. Swore lustily as he thought of his failure. He knew fewer traders came now he commanded than when McLeod had charge and the place was a hive of noisy industry. To shoulder the blame of failure was a bitter blow to his vanity; to confess to his superiors at Niagara he was unsuccessful, calamitous to his further advancement in the service of New France.

"Had McLeod worked with me, we had long ere this made a better report to Lavalterie," he muttered, thinking of what that gentleman would have to say when next he met him at Niagara. "Thousand furies, I may consider myself recalled, and through him. How in the name of all the Saints may I restore a trade that was already ended ere I came? The devil seize McLeod, the Fort, and the cursed custom into the bargain." Turning, he paced the uneven floor, creaking dismally beneath his irritated footsteps.

Captain de Celeron had risen rapidly in the service. He was but twenty-one years of age, a mere boy to forest trading. The jealous said, his father, the Comte de Jouey, a powerful statesman in the old land, had more to do with his advancement than brains. At any rate, he was in command of Fort Toronto to effect a restoration of the place to its former profitable state. Under his orders a military régime had at once superseded the easy-going civil rule of McLeod, the former storekeeper and officer in charge; that was in its operation a deadly blow to the desired end.

Drunkenness, buffoonery, was displaced by a forced sobriety, foreign to the ideas of the trappers who made the place their headquarters. Theft was punished by instant consignment to the "pit"; barefaced robbery instantly avenged by the rope that needed but one application to effect a permanent cure. As a consequence custom dwindled. Truthfully, it had ceased to exist from the first week since the young officer had come to take over his envied command.

Now, to crown failure, came the appearance of this spy. Without doubt, the advance guard of a British force, near at hand, waiting ready to surprise his tiny outpost. Worst of all troubles, McLeod disliked him intensely, had forbidden his

daughter to hold converse with him, and ordered her to avoid his presence as she would a pesthouse.

He knew of that. Peche, the corporal, a creature of his own, had overheard and related the story. To-day he had heard the girl's open dislike of him. She had cajoled him only to run away, and then the father, whose advice was now of the utmost importance, had threatened to leave the Fort.

Savagely he clenched his teeth as the combination of troubles was brought home to his lonely mind. "A thousand demons," he said; "she gains favors from me to escape when payment is demanded. I would I had never set eyes on her." Then the soft beauty of the girl rose to his vision in the half-dark room; the bewitching smile on red lips made but for kisses; the sparkling eyes whose glances turned to disdain at his approach; and throwing out his arms, he muttered, "Oh, Madeline, I crave pardon. Your tender heart is not to blame. 'Tis a surly old father who fills your dainty ears with tales of my evil purpose towards you."

For a moment he stood, oppressed with a new sense of loneliness, strange and unaccountable. Suddenly he strode to the door, demanding from his orderly a bottle of rum. "Some friend I must have in this forsaken spot," he muttered. "For lack of a wiser and better spirit, the bottle must take its place." When the soldier appeared, he seized the dusty flask, filled a mug to the brim and tossed off the liquor at a draft. "Loneliness is the devil's own invention and must be exorcised by the spirit," he laughed, and poured another drink.

Long he sat pondering his troubles, drinking deep even in that day of abysmal potations and protracted sittings at the wine cup. But though he gulped mug after mugful, his mind retained its clearness of vision; his speech remained distinct, proved by the manner in which he spoke, when brooding thought demanded sound to break the uneasy silence.

A sharp tap on the door roused him to the present. With steady tongue he commanded the intruder to enter, and Sergeant Pere appeared.

"Come to report the prisoner has received attention, my Captain," he said, saluting smartly. Under his breath he muttered, "Name of a fish, but he seeks consolation in the wrong quarter with a vengeance. The remedy is like to prove worse than the disease." But not a muscle of his countenance be-

trayed his thoughts.

"'Tis too good for the dog. Place him in the 'pit' again. I was a fool to even have him taken from it until he swings."

"Your orders shall be obeyed, my Captain."

"Of a truth they will, or I know good reason for their disobeyance." He rose from his chair, swaying, with reeling brain. "Have a care, my man," he stuttered wrathfully. "I say my orders will all times be obeyed here."

"If the man stay in that place overnight he is like to die of chill," Sergeant Pere said slowly. "'Tis no place for a healthy one and he is sorely wounded." The young man glared.

"Have a care, old one, I warn you," he shouted, pouring another mugful, spilled down the lace of his coat in its passage to his mouth. "You lean too much to the enemies of New France."

"When I was at Brest under Dieskau," Sergeant Pere remonstrated respectfully, after a silence of some moments, "scores of the English were captured, but he would have scorned to place the worst of them in such a spot." Then Captain de Celeron became convulsed with rage.

"Dieskau be d——" he shouted. "He was unfit to command a regiment of swine." Shaking his fist, he went on thickly, "Have a care, my man, have a care, or into the 'pit' you go to keep your spy company." Then he sank back muttering, attempting to pour more spirits from the empty flask.

Sergeant Pere remained silent. Years of military discipline had dulled the fire of his naturally hot temper. Experience had also taught him many a threatened punishment of the evening was not half so bad the next morning. Besides, his officer had evidently imbibed too freely, and that was good excuse for harsh language. Therefore it was often best to remain silent, but to-night his scar took on a deeper hue. His beloved Dieskau had received gross insult from a lad who had yet to win his spurs.

"Name of the Saints, can you not answer me, fool?" the young man shouted, growing the more angry at his sub's silence. "Answer me on the instant." And the elder wondered at his folly in coming there at such a moment.

"I but await your orders, my Captain," he answered mildly, and thought to himself, "Had I known he was so deep in liquor,

I would have waited until he drowned. I am a poor target for any man's drunken wrath."

"You will not wait long then. Place him in the 'pit,' place him with the devil for aught I care. And take warning — have a care, I say, or into the 'pit' you go, and Dieskau with you, were he here."

Then he fell backward, slipped sideways and appeared to sleep. Sergeant Pere stood looking on with pity in his eyes, for the youngster was as a son to his warped affections. Not that for one moment Captain de Celeron would have acknowledged such relationship, even had his sub been inclined to advance it. The regard was all on one side. Never openly displayed. But when a sergeant of foot has successfully dry-nursed a cub lieutenant through the several trying stages of military discipline; has licked into shape the men of his company, then the inferior, if the superior be anything of a man, cannot but feel affection for the boy he has assisted to fashion to a good officer.

The old man sighed heavily. He foresaw much trouble in store at the outpost were its commander to take to forbidden liquor. He was also sorry for the young man. He suspected that his little cabbage had won an undesired lover. She, too, might find trouble on her hands. Again he sighed. Thinking the other had fallen asleep, he was about to go, but his first stealthy step aroused him, and he waited.

"I say Dieskau was a swine and a breeder of swine," Captain de Celeron shouted, struggling to his feet, to wave a wild arm in the air. "A pig-dog German swine, I repeat. I would he were here to have my opinion of his doings." Suddenly he sat down, his voice trailing off into meaningless mutterings. His head fell forward on his chest, and he tumbled headlong to the floor.

"Name of a fish, but he would die of shame could he take notice of such antics," the old man muttered. "Had Dieskau passed at the moment, he would have needed few blankets to keep him warm when next he slept." Then he half dragged, half carried his officer to the next room, stripped off his boots, covered him with a blanket and returned to the outer room. "Name of a million fishes, to think such storm came of such a small flask, but perhaps I prate too much of a brave man and his skill to youngsters who grow jealous of a fame they are little

like to reach. I will remember." And he wagged his head to remind himself of a more discreet mention of a beloved commander's name.

Near on an hour passed silently, and still he sat motionless. He was thinking how to account for the non-appearance of his superior when the night rounds were made. All within the Fort knew that duty a self-imposed task of its commander. The placing of each sentry one of his most particular personal attentions. Sergeant Pere had often smiled at the care of his officer. Now he scowled at the thought of it.

"Without there," he shouted as an idea occurred to him. "Ho, orderly!" And as the soldier appeared, smiling, "You have heard some loud talk, my man. An thy face wear that grin to me again, into the 'pit' you go for the next ten days. You hear?" he said, shaking his fist under the terrified soldier's nose. "And remember, if your cackling tongue utter one word of what your gross mind be filled with, I will have its roots in the morning, so beware."

"I have heard naught, my Sergeant," the man muttered in a shaking voice. This old sub, with his scarred face, that wore at times a devilish look, his grewsome tales of what Dieskau was wont to do with his soldiers, was feared by every one of the garrison. "I will be silent," he muttered, and turned to go.

"Stay, imbecile, and allow my orders to sink into the vacancy where thy brains should be. Go to the prisoner at my quarters. Escort him here. On the way, inform the storekeeper I have need of him. Haste!" And the terrified soldier fled. "That fellow will never dare smile while I am about," he grinned, well pleased. Then fell to busy thinking. He had a scheme on hand and was anxious to set it working.

He was sure the orderly would hold his tongue now. He liked the men to fear him. Knew well that fright kept many a coward in the ranks when courage would have lent speed to his feet. Fear of himself would ensure silence as to his officer's raving. He counted on that to keep from the soldiers news of Captain de Celeron having lost control of his appetite; a matter he desired to hide at this particular moment. A critical period in the history of the outpost, liable to surprise by the advancing British, who he was sure were near in force.

"Should my little man awake — and one never knows the freaks of the foolish," he muttered absently —"he might go

the length of providing more rope than I require. I wonder will McLeod think well of my purpose?" Adding, slowly, with a scowl born of past experience in dealing with his crony, "Doubtless he will prove a mule an the idea not meet with his approval."

A sounding knock followed and the man he spoke of entered, throwing sharp glances about the dismal room. "Why, Sergeant," he began quickly, "where is the Captain?"

"Come in, my friend. I have need of your advice."

"But where is Captain de Celeron?" the other persisted.

"Where he is little likely to recover, for, say — at least three or four hours. He has dipped deep and requires some time to dry his wits. You understand?" And the other nodded.

"'Twere best for some of us that he never recovered," he muttered savagely.

"Nay, nay, McLeod; I admit he has much to learn in the conduct of honorable warfare —"

"Aye, and much more in his conduct as a gentleman."

"I repeat, McLeod, he has much to learn in the conduct of honorable warfare, though at times he has good opinion of his ability. But, be seated; that is not what I sent for you to discuss."

The storekeeper came close, leaning down to the level of his companion's face. "The cursed cub offends my daughter," he hissed, beating one knotted fist on the rough table top. "He is a coward —"

"And my superior officer as he is yours," came the stern reply. "If you have aught to say against him, at least wait until he is here to defend himself."

McLeod was anything but a coward, and the justice of the statement appealed to his sense of fairness. "I apologize, Sergeant," he muttered ungraciously, "but a father may not stand calmly by and see his only daughter made a —"

"Easy, easy, my friend. I know. I know. I have seen. I have understanding of your position. 'Tis fear for the maid that makes our tongue wag like a shrew's to her late returning husband. However, our little Captain will do small harm to any the next few hours." And he yawned chasm-like, motioning the storekeeper to a chair.

"And after?" the latter questioned. "After that?" he re-

peated. The face of his companion twisted to a frown of doubt. "Why cross a bridge till the planks lay beneath the feet? Forget for a moment our little maid. Answer me this question. Where may I find accommodation for a wounded white man?"

"In your quarters, if he be your friend," came the snappy answer.

"But, supposing he is unwelcome to my landlord?"

"'Tis the stranger you have in mind, Sergeant?"

"Aye, he cannot remain in the 'pit.'"

"'Twas a dog's trick to place him there," McLeod replied harshly, his rage rising anew at thought of the man who loved his girl.

"True, and it were a mercy to find him some dryer lodging," the old one said, craftily playing on the sympathy of his companion. "I know a man when I see one, and 'tis well to stand friends with such in this land."

"You would have me give him shelter?"

"He will do no harm to you. He is dumb!"

"But his eyes may speak, and — well, a mistake on your part, Sergeant, a misunderstanding as to my daughter's relation with this man renders his accommodation at our lodging somewhat distasteful to her."

"And her fiancé?" Sergeant Pere said surprised.

"He is not," the other said shortly. "That is the cause of my hesitation."

"But her readiness to assist. Her confusion —"

"Accounted for by finding him half naked on the beach — also, er — a message you delivered — that is an you did deliver it?"

"Name of a fish, now I do understand his woodenness," the Sergeant said hurriedly. "I suppose then he must remain at my quarters, but 'twould be best he lodged with you. Will you not take him? One moment," as McLeod, shaking his head, turned to go. "I hear someone."

The door was thrust open to admit Francis Birnon.

The storekeeper with a rapid glance took in the stalwart appearance of the young man as he walked to the table, eying the two with steady gaze. He nodded his approval, was about to go with a muttered good night, when his crony rose from his chair.

"Well, my savior of worthless carcasses," he smiled, "here is a host for awhile. He will provide you shelter. Go with him. Good night to you both." And he turned again to his chair, as though the matter was settled to the complete satisfaction of all.

McLeod flushed angrily. His first impulse to refuse hospitality. He hesitated, scowled at the grinning Sergeant, then said slowly, "Come, stranger. This gentleman commands here for the present, and I must obey orders. Come." And without a word he stalked outside, Birnon following with some hesitation, for the manner of his reception by his host was, to say the least, cold.

When the door closed, the old soldier lay back in his chair and roared his merriment.

"Name of a fish," he gasped, wiping the tears from his eyes, "but the storekeeper is vexed. My romance was shattered, eh? Well, I will build it anew. When I so do, the lovers shall love to my order. The father is angry — well, I did not build his spare carcass or his surly mind. Had I so done, he should have proved more amenable to my purpose. As 'tis, an my little cabbage is not his fiancée now, she shall be in the future. She shall have opportunity to learn her lesson this very night, or —" Then he muttered, "I wonder do I do right to play with fate?"

Quietly he rose, stole on tiptoe across the room, peeped in at his snoring officer, who lay as one dead to the world. Then he passed out under the silent stars, whose twinkling gleams were the only light be needed to do the duty of his superior lying drunken as any tippling Missassaga, incapable of service to New France.

CHAPTER VII

HOW A MAID DARED MUCH FOR A MAN

WABACOMMEGAT, flying from imagined pursuit through the depths of the leafy forest, presently emerged from its shelter, coming out to the grassy sweep on whose sadly trampled surface, were pitched the tepees of his tribe. Furious at his treatment, enraged at the insult offered to his Chief's dignity before the crowd, his body sore from the vigorous application of a heavy pair of feet, shod in yet heavier leather, he was in the mood for mad doings.

His son sat at the door of his lodge, and with a grunt, he invited him to enter. "Senascot," he said harshly, "you love our allies, the French?" And the son stared to find his father sober; such event so rare, he pondered long his answer.

"Senascot desires safety for his people," he said at last, and a silence settled down in the foul tent, broken only by the murmurings of distant water, and the sighing of the breeze in the lofty pine tops overhead. "Safety for our people," he added softly, and the father leaped to his feet, stoicism forgotten at thought of injury.

"Senascot," he said harshly, "I, a chief — and the son of a hundred chiefs ruling their Tribe of the Crane, long ere these white dogs came to steal our lands and destroy our people, was this day received with blows. Blows! I say. With many kicks from that child of the Evil One — he of the scarred face. Wabacommegat, your chief and father, was driven from the lodges of his allies with blows. Will my son — my only son, stand tamely by and hear of the shame heaped on the head of this father?" As suddenly as he had risen he sat, squatting cross-legged. From under his shaggy eyebrows, keenly regarded the features of his son, that from their rigidity might have been carved from marble.

"Will my father continue to heap shame on the heads of his people for the sake of the strongwater these white dogs bring?"

Wabacommegat stared, silent, astounded at the daring of one so young, venturing to criticise a chief, so much the more ex-

perienced. "A son is brave indeed to speak such words to a father," he growled, and Senascot bounded to his feet, with eyes that blazed passionate hatred.

"That son would be a coward if he sought to hide truth," he said sternly, "even to a father, who robs his tribe for the sake of such strongwater." Then he waited.

For a moment he expected a knife blade seeking his heart. Save for Rose of the Hills, whose very footsteps in the grass he worshiped, he would have been content to die. The miserable life led by the remnant of his people, the men degraded to beggary, their women debauched by the soldiery, all for the sake of the hated liquor, was a daily misery to him. But, though these evils were openly apparent, to mention them, and above all lay the blame for their happening on the shoulders of his father, required much courage. So thought Wabacommegat, scowling under the truthful accusation.

"Senascot," he said, repressing his anger, "I alone am not to blame. From this moment not one drop shall pass my lips." As the young brave remained silent, for these morning sober tales were ancient to his ears, "My words are the words of truth. Revenge I will have upon these white dogs who steal our lands and insult our women."

The son stared deep into the eyes of the author of his being. He thought he saw truth there. Leaping to his feet, his chest heaving with excitement, he said brokenly, "Does my father plan revenge for his injuries, our young men will be first to win scalps and victory. But one thing do I ask. The stranger — him we carried to the Fort. He must be mine. I will cause him to wish the sun had never risen on the day of his birth." And the father muttered words of approval.

"Good," he said harshly; "the stranger is yours, but scarred face — he is mine. He, too, shall wish the sun had died ere he saw its light. Come! We will plan. These men are few. They trust us. We are their friends. We will gather the young men together, and this night leap in on them — and then!"

Together the two sat, eagerly perfecting their horrid plans. The stealthy advance toward the Fort, the bloody massacre of all but two who were to be reserved for a more awful deed. The giving of the buildings to the flames, that should consume the slaughtered fragments of their defenders. One desired sat-

isfaction on a soldier who had robbed him of savage honor; the other, revenge on a stranger, who had stolen the affections of his bride. Senascot had not the slightest doubt that Rose of the Hills loved the man whose hand she had confessed to fondling near on the whole of one long summer morning. For this reason he was ready to join with his father.

Had the two moved outside they had seen a stealthy figure creep quietly away from the rear of the tepee where they sat. And both, had they dreamed of her errand, would without hesitation have stabbed keen knives deep into her heaving round bosom. Rose of the Hills had heard horror planned. As she stole cautiously away through the swift-descending gloom, her throbbing brain was filled with but one thought — safety for her white man.

Silently she reached the shelter of the forest. Ran swiftly through its dusky spaces, her heart wild with apprehension that some evil shape, appearing with descent of the sun, leap out on her to tear her slim body to a thousand unrecognizable fragments. Stormily her bosom heaved with the speed of her racing footsteps, as she ran and ran until the huge trees thinned out to saplings and they gave place to a spreading underbrush. Then she paused to regain breath and think on a course of action.

The lights of the Fort twinkled bravely in the short twilight. Smoke from the two clay chimneys ascended straight skyward on the still air. All was peaceful. No thought of slaughter seemed within miles. Then she hurried to the gate, beating sharply on the wood. A startled sentry peered over the wall, demanding her errand.

"What does the Missassaga woman do here at this hour?" he said in jeering tones, dangling a lantern on the end of a thong to the level of her face.

"The Captain," she answered bravely, though the lewd manner of the fellow alarmed her more than all thought of evil spirits. "I must see him." But the sentry roared his laughter.

"He is better employed, girl. Return to-morrow, then he may find time for you." With a sneer he drew up his lantern and disappeared.

The girl gave a frightened cry as she crouched at the gate side. What to do, she had no idea. Return to her lodge

through the blackness of the forest was fearful. Worse would happen to her should Wabacommegat and his young men come to find her giving warning to an enemy. Long she waited. The sun sank to rest beneath a dull canopy of cloud, that bristled with vivid lightning. The thunder growled angrily at intervals, and the maid became terrified. Manitou was angry at her errand, and desperately did she cling the closer to the wooden gate for some protection. Thoughts of her end at the hands of Wabacommegat, Senascot's brutality did they find her, caused despair to her mind. Piteously she cried for admittance, and the sentry losing patience with her stubbornness leaned over.

"Ho, there, girl," he said roughly, "cease such howling. I will see what I may do." And again he disappeared. Hurrying across the darkness of the stockade, he stumbled into Sergeant Pere setting forth alone. "There is a maid seeking admittance at the gate," he muttered awkwardly, at a loss to give good account for his absence from duty. His face burned at the stinging reply.

"Was there none other to bear her message, save thy fool's face?"

"She desires to see Captain de Celeron."

"So, and your post was at the mercy of the devil knows who, eh? An I had you at Brest, I would make you acquainted with a lady whose introduction would cause a soreness to your vile carcass not easily forgotten. The gunner's daughter remains long in the memory of those who had the misfortune to become acquainted with her. Lead on, idiot. Where is this girl? What does she require? Stay, I will see for myself. Fools may not be trusted with a woman."

Sergeant Pere was not in the best possible humor. He had been thinking. Had he done right, as an officer of New France, in allowing the spy the freedom of his command? Yet, was he a spy? Shaking his head doubtfully he paced along. His was a peculiar position. The man had saved his life and he was grateful; willing to assist him to the best of his ability. But now the responsibility of the safety of the Fort rested on his own shoulders, and though he liked the young fellow — well the point of view had changed. Another matter troubled him. McLeod had seemed too willing to offer hospitality. Of course, at first, he had hesitated, but, after,

the two had gone out together seeming quite satisfied. Were they in league together? Was it all part of a plan to betray Fort Toronto?

Then he laughed sourly. "McLeod is too old a bird," he muttered. "The other — Name of a fish, but I know him to be of gentle birth. A sheep's head may see that. Well, 'tis done, and now to see this girl."

"Who seeks admittance at this hour?" he asked, cautiously unbarring the gate. As the girl stumbled to her feet, blinking in the lantern light — "Rose of the Hills, what do you here?"

"Where Captain," she stammered, taking one quick step past the two. Detained forcibly but gently by a heavy hand, she tried to escape. "Must see Captain," she urged, and Sergeant Pere grinned.

"Wabacommegat was not long in making complaint," he laughed. "I will hear the news, my girl." But she slipped from his grasp, running toward the storehouse with silent feet.

"Name of a fish, but I am more shepherd than soldier this night," the Sergeant muttered. With a wrathful command to see the gate be closely barred, he hurried after the maid, who stood peering in through the storehouse window. "The Captain is not to be found there, girl," he commenced, but his eyes were set on a strange scene inside the room, and he whistled. "Name of a fish, but there are two of them learning the lesson I set for one, and there is but one book."

Rose of the Hills stood rigid, her eyes watching every movement of her friend Madeline, tenderly bathing a wound in the stranger's face. She intuitively understood what must happen, for the man smiled and his nurse betrayed agitation, as the bowl near slipped from her fingers. With a moan the maid turned toward Sergeant Pere, and he, too, understood, for he tenderly patted her shoulder, endeavoring to take her away.

"Come, maiden," he said softly; "what is the errand?" But again she eluded his kind hands, running to the gateway, beating at the senseless wood. "Now, listen," he said somewhat sharply; "the Captain is not to be found here. Come, I say, 'tis shameful to see so fine a maid showing tantrums in the open. If you have business with my commandant, and none else will serve, I will see what may be done. Come! I

will take you to his lodging."

Rose of the Hills but half understood the rapid sentences, though the word lodging sounded as a place of refuge to her distress. With head bent low on a heaving bosom she followed her silent guide, and he, watching closely, noted she carefully avoided even as much as one glance toward the storehouse windows. They came to the guardhouse; entered, to find the silence murdered by most unmusical snoring.

"Now, my girl," Sergeant Pere said kindly, "what is this message?"

For a moment the girl stood silent, her face the picture of grief. Staring, she waited, until the old man said patiently, "What is amiss? Never mind, I will think myself answered. I know. Now what is this message?" and she started, coming to his side.

"Captain ill?" she asked, and a troubled look spread over the scarred face.

"Yes, ill of the same sickness Wabacommegat affects at times. You understand? Name of a fish, but your wits are here after all."

Rose of the Hills described in rapid pantomime the actions of a drunken man. Then she came closer, whispered slowly, "You Captain now?" And the other stared.

"Yes," he nodded with a grim smile, "an there may be worse."

"My people bad," came the impressive whisper. "Wabacommegat bad. Senascot wicked. Come to-night and — kill. You understand? What you do?" impatiently, with a stamp of the foot.

"Do, maiden?" Sergeant Pere repeated vacantly. "Do?" he added, tapping the table top with nervous fingers; "I do not know."

For the moment his blood turned to ice within his veins. An Indian rising; his officer drunken to senselessness, and but fifteen soldiers, himself, a storekeeper and a wounded stranger to repel the attack. With two women to care for! There were near on a hundred Missassagas in camp close at hand. What chance had such tiny force as he possessed of defense from brutal slaughter? None that he could see. He sat lost in thought, until a gentle hand upon his arm aroused him to the present.

"What you do?" she said quickly. "What you do? Bad men come. Take fort and kill all." The touch of contempt in her voice suddenly restored the old soldier to all his faculties.

"Art sure of the news, maiden?" he asked sternly.

"Wabacommegat sat with Senascot. Rose of the Hills heard. This day. What you do now?"

"If thy tidings be true, girl, we are like to die. Now, what makes you turn on your own people?"

"Wabacommegat beat Rose of the Hills. He bad man. I come. He kill me when he come to-night."

There was something in her tone of voice that made Sergeant Pere pause ere he asked suspiciously, "What for? Why did the chief strike you?"

"Rose of the Hills came to his tent. The white stranger was there. Wabacommegat angry—" Here she hesitated, dropping her head upon a heaving bosom. From the expression of her face, the trembling of her slender limbs, her companion understood the cause of her visit. The safety of the stranger, not her own fears of death, had brought her.

"So, he had already discovered a nurse," he muttered. "Name of a fish, but he is a very wizard with the women." Aloud, he said with a rueful shake of the head, "Maiden, I fear me there is a rough road ahead for your little feet, but if I live, I will do what I may to ease the way. Now, wait here until I return. I must to the storekeeper. He is the most sensible of the idiots who reside with me in this place."

He hurried from the room, and the girl cast herself down in his chair, flinging both arms out on the table in tragic loneliness.

The old soldier ran across the stockade, and without waiting to knock quickly pushed open the door of the storekeeper's dwelling.

"I need you, McLeod, at once," he said sharply, and turned to return, but not before his keen glance fell on the stranger, stretched out upon a couch, covered with an embroidered quilt.

Father and daughter had been sitting before a small log fire. Both started to their feet. A battered volume falling from the storekeeper's knee was the only sound to break the silence for near on a minute.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is there robbery afoot?"

And for answer Sergeant Pere grimly nodded.

"Not yet," he replied sourly, "but there may be an we take not precious good care." Under his breath, for he had no desire to unduly alarm his little maid, he added, "A robbery of hair we can little afford."

Madeline stooped to recover the precious book. Tenderly she wiped the treasured volume. Charlevoix's "Histoire de la Nouvelle France," the only printed pages entirely her own possession, to carefully replace it on the table. "One friend must not be badly treated because of another's intrusion," she thought, as with a smile she waited.

"Come, McLeod, I need you at once," Sergeant Pere said again; and as he saw the start of alarm on the girl's features, he added kindly, "he is not desired, my little one. 'Tis your father, I must have with me at once."

Without another word he walked out, and the storekeeper kissed his daughter tenderly, bidding her for certain to bar the door until he returned. Then he followed, most uneasy of mind. He suspected Captain de Celeron wished a word or two with him, and he was in no mood for battle.

Madeline obeyed the instructions of her parent to the letter. Then she seated herself before the fire and gave her mind to fancies the most charming. Dreams of a fairy prince were at last, perhaps, to come true. This wornout stranger, though clad in the roughest of garbs, she instinctively knew to be of gentle birth. Womanly intuition was sure, without the added proof of speech and manner. Though he was accused of spying, should now have occupied the "pit," she knew he was honest. Entirely different to those selling secrets for a living. Not the sort of man stooping to vile things. And suddenly the brush of hope tinted her fair cheeks with a glorious hue, the color painted only by the master whose name is love.

Strange to say, the girl discovered the features of her stranger exactly fitted a vacant frame in the picture gallery of her mind. His face a perfect copy of the original she had dreamed of, as girls will. And as she sat alone — for Francis Birnon slept as one lost to the world — her heart beat soft for the tired object of her dreaming. The fire was not altogether to blame for the roses in her cheeks. Maids are thought bold who do the asking. They rarely do, save in the pages

of romance. But had the sleeper awakened at the moment, the light of love in her eyes might have made him bold. Her gladness touched the tinder of love to the heap of affection waiting ready in his bosom for that divine spark.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTAIN DE CELERON FINDS ONE MAN TOO MUCH FOR HIM

WHEN Norman McLeod entered the guardhouse for the second time that fateful evening, he was astonished to discover the Indian maid occupying the chair devoted to the uses of his Captain. And more than surprised at the utter dejection displayed on her usually smiling features, hurriedly raised from the depths of her outstretched arms at his abrupt entrance.

"What does she here? What ails her?" he asked, addressing Sergeant Pere, frowning silent his pity.

"Inquire of her," he said short. "She has a strange tale."

The storekeeper stared amazed. Then the sound of loud snoring met his ear. "For the moment I thought he had sent for me," he sneered. "But I hear him groaning. A fine commander to restore a dying trade."

"He is no better, McLeod. Is not like to be for some hours. Yet I did not drag you from home to prate of his pranks. This maid has more important news to my mind. Come, maiden," he added gently, "relate your story to this good man."

The girl rose from her seat. Came close to McLeod, who regarded her with some doubt. He had dealings with the Missassaga every day of his life. According to his experience they were thieves, rogues, robbers and liars, both male and female, even to the veriest infants crawling to his storehouse begging for sugar. "Well, Rose," he said with a smile, "what story am I brought to hear at such an hour?" And the girl hesitated for the fraction of a second.

"Wabacommegat come. His young men come. They kill all. This man, he know," she said, pointing to the sergeant waiting with folded arms, anxiously observing the effect upon his friend.

"Ho! ho!" laughed McLeod derisively. "They come — if that is all, I am better employed at home." With a shrug

he turned to go, but the old soldier caught him by the coat sleeve.

"You are pleased to be merry, my friend," he muttered. "Think you she would venture here without good reason?" And again the storekeeper roared his merriment. Here was a pretty tale to tell of the brave Sergeant Pere. He of all men to be scared by the frightened story of a woman. One glance he gave at the face of his crony, and at its comical aspect of doubt roared the louder. But Rose of the Hills grew angry. With a frown she said impressively, "White man laugh. White man see. Wabacommegat come. Then white man not laugh — he die."

Contemptuously she stared at the mocker of news, then suddenly seated herself at the table, sobbing as though her heart would burst. The storekeeper as suddenly ceased his merriment. With an air of apology, he said slowly, "Never mind, Rose." Then to the Sergeant, "Pardon, but these chicken-hearted Missassagas to storm the Fort! 'Tis enough to kill a man with laughter even to think on it. Had you said Iroquois, I should have feared. As for these dogs who daily swill their lives away, who live on us — why man, I tell you 'tis rank nonsense, such talk."

The Sergeant shook his head. Used as he was to warfare with the savage Iroquois, who scalped women and children without mercy, tortured their tender bodies for the sheer pleasure of the agonized cries produced by slow fires, and splinters of pinewood inserted in soft flesh, the reception given to the grim tidings of the girl amazed him. "McLeod," he said angrily, "'tis surely ignorance of these red devils that makes you indifferent. Name of a fish, but these brutes are to be feared by such a handful as we, be they Iroquois or Missassagas."

"My word on it, friend, the last-named would sell their souls for firewater; but peril their bodies for it — nay. I have lived among them too long — know them too well. The first — well, I would not trust my scalp among the least of them."

The old man frowned. To him a savage was a savage, capable of the most hideous atrocity, no matter what the totem he painted on his copper-colored carcass. He stood, thinking of the many tales he had heard. Of Monongahela, where

hundreds of reeking British scalps were brandished in the faces of French officers, sickened to the soul by horror, yet powerless to stay the lust of slaughter they had incited. And he, too, had fought in battles with the redmen — if battles they could be named — where savages fell on white men, unused to forest death-traps laid for their unskilled persons. Such enemies were to be regarded with suspicion; their slightest animosity guarded against with every precaution.

McLeod was quick to note the volumes of doubt on his crony's face. "See," he said, "I know these Missassagas. They are cowards — drunken dogs to a man. Their women — bah! — worse. I know them well —"

"No white man know Indian," the girl suddenly interjected, and the storekeeper admitted that truth. "This night they come. What you do?" She shook his rough coat sleeve vehemently.

Sergeant Pere was very doubtful despite the assurance of McLeod. "Child," he said, "I would I had the truth of the matter. An they come, we will welcome them warmly." Seeing the wretchedness on her face, he led her to the chair. "Rest awhile. I must out to the walls. McLeod, you remain until I return. I shall not be long gone." And without another word he walked heavily out.

The storekeeper took two or three turns up and down the room. Knowing well the boasting propensities of the Indian in liquor, he paid slight attention to the warning of the maid. He thought her tribe had secured strongwater from some unauthorized source — possibly stolen it from his stores — and had been relating wonderful tales of what they would do were the Fort to fall into their hands. The girl had overheard and, becoming frightened, rushed off to warn her friends.

"The Missassagas fight," he said aloud, laughing harshly; "their hides be too precious to them." And Rose of the Hills, her eyes flashing angrily at his cynical unbelief, ran to his side.

"Wabacommegat come. This night," she said, and the storekeeper halted.

"Why do you turn against them?" he asked suspiciously. "What have they done that one of their own brood should peck out their eyes?"

The girl shook her head. She was unable to convince this man, so harsh in manner. He would not think a maiden

capable of sacrifice for a stranger. Would not understand. But she was mistaken. Had she only known, beneath his crusty manner lay the crumb of tenderness to all women, were they of copper color or of whiter hue. Then again, she had little desire to save him or his daughter. Neither did the narrow-chested soldier find a place in her thoughts. The stranger, he must be saved from danger. If these two men refused to listen she must find the commander of the Fort.

She knew he would listen. He was always on the alert against treachery of his allies, her tribe. Had he not commanded that every one of the Missassaga be without the stockade at sundown, on pain of forfeiting their scanty ration of brandy, did they dare disobey? She knew he lay in the next room. How to gain his ear, rouse him to listen, puzzled her vaguely.

A thought flashed across her mind. On the instant she flew over the floor, scream after scream leaving her lips, until the storekeeper thought her mad. He hurried to her side. Then stopped short.

In the doorway of the adjoining room stood Captain de Celeron. His hair tousled, his uniform coat on all awry. Clutching at the doorpost, he stared from man to girl, the light of drunken madness in his blazing eyes. "Thousand fiends," he stuttered, "but someone pays for this intrusion. Am I to be disturbed in the privacy of my own rooms? By all the devils in hell, I will not have such work." Then his eyes fell on the storekeeper standing stock still in the center of the floor. "Do you dare?" he shouted. "You!"

Rose of the Hills stood, near frightened to death at the storm she had purposely aroused. Hiding her face she tried to close her ears to the blasphemies of the young officer, roused to a sudden fury at the impertinence of the storekeeper in entering unbidden to his rooms. Then the outer door opened quietly and Sergeant Pere appeared, hesitated, thoroughly uneasy at the sight of a man he had thought safe to sleep the clock around.

Quickly making up his mind he walked forward, saluting respectfully. "Your pardon, my Captain," he said, "but the hour is late. Would it not be better that you retire, leaving me to deal with this fellow?" But his only reply was a sudden blow that swept him bodily to the floor. A shouting to

the guards without to enter.

"Arres' that man!" Captain de Celeron raved, near foaming at the mouth. "To the 'pit' with him. Guard! Guard!" But none answered his frenzied call, for the very good reason that Sergeant Pere had warned the soldiers to stay without on pain of instant punishment. Then with a wild rush the young man was across the floor, seized McLeod by his middle, struggled to throw him roughly to the boards.

Together the two fought madly, up and down the room. The chair was kicked to one side, the table overturned, the copper candlesticks flattened by heavy boots. In the darkness came the sound of sobbing breaths, vicious cries and the noise of heavy blows dull thudding on bruised flesh.

Rose of the Hills crouched out of the way in one corner, while Sergeant Pere groped over the floor, seeking to find a candle, that by its light he might separate the combatants. Just as he succeeded in making a spark with flint and steel, by the flicker of the flattened candle he saw the storekeeper thrust his opponent heavily backward, the head of the latter striking the rough boards with a sickening crash.

Then as the weak flame grew brighter, he caught a side glance of McLeod standing over the fallen man, horror in his face, and he hurried to kneel on the floor by the side of his officer.

"Name of a fish, but this is a mess," he said; and, as McLeod nodded, "Head and boards came too sudden together, I fear he is badly hurt. We will place him on the bed."

A fifteen-minute strenuous labor by both men followed. For all their efforts Captain de Celeron remained unconscious, his only sign of life the heaving of a white chest and the stertorous breathing from ghastly lips.

"I trust he will come to, but, by all the Saints, he wears the face of many a one I have seen lie on the field of battle." The storekeeper started at the words. His face turned ashen gray as his companion went on, "We must try brandy. He has had one bath, but another is needed now." And the pair silently rubbed the senseless man until their arms ached of a fruitless task.

"I was not altogether to blame," McLeod muttered. "You know that, Sergeant. You must know it," he said fiercely, grasping the arm of his companion with such force

that the old man yelled.

"Is that reason why you should cut the flesh from my bones?" he asked with a scowl. "Name of a fish, it was he who commenced the trouble, and were he a common soldier should taste the 'pit' the instant he wakes. That is," he added slowly, "an he ever does wake."

"Blessed Saints, Sergeant," McLeod stammered, "he must recover. He must. God! am I to be his murderer, too?"

"I trust he will for your sake," came the grim reply, and the other, recognizing all that lay hidden for the future behind that curt answer, groaned aloud. His daughter! What of her future with himself a common felon, the murderer of an officer whose life was sacred to the welfare of New France!

Staring blindly ahead, he stumbled from the room. Out to the blackness of the night, that was brilliant as the midday sun compared to the gloom of his dreadful thought.

Sergeant Pere made no attempt to follow. Wagging his head solemnly, he seated his lank body on the bed where lay his officer, white and still as any wax figure uncolored by the deft fingers of the artist. "Name of a fish," he muttered to himself, "but the storekeeper is in deep water. Even though I bear witness to his innocence of crime, it will go hard with the pair of us, for I commanded the men to stay without, and who will bear witness to my honesty of purpose?" His pursed-up lips drew a long breath. That order given to save his superior from open shame was like to cost something he little cared to think on. "Name of a fish, were Dieskau here now—" then savagely, "Aye, were he so, I would be taking my last pleasure in a swing too high for comfort."

"What white man do now?" a soft voice whispered in his ear, and he jumped from the bed to discover Rose of the Hills at his elbow.

"Maiden," he replied angrily, "when I am meditating on my end, I care not to be rudely disturbed. As for what I am to do now, I can but wait as may you also. I have done everything possible to guard against surprise. Seat yourself." And the girl obediently obeyed.

Together the two remained in the dim room, the silence broken only by the fitful breathing of the injured man. "'Twas not like himself," Sergeant Pere muttered thoughtfully. "But these women have much to answer for in this world to which the priests say they first brought sin."

CHAPTER IX

TWO SAVE ANOTHER WHO HAS DONE ONE MUCH INJURY

NORMAN McLEOD, stumbling out to the darkness of early morning, moved with unsteady feet over the ankle-deep dust of the stockaded enclosure. Blindly he walked, until the hoarse challenge of a watchful sentry recalled him to where he wandered. A hastily muttered word assured the soldier, and he turned back to the storehouse.

"Twice! twice!" he muttered, leaning against the log wall. "Two murders on my sinful soul. God! Will there ever be an end to this senseless shedding of blood?"

A groan burst from him. Passionate remorse caused his hands to clench, until the pain of interlocked fingers forced remembrance of what he did. Then the oval face of his daughter appeared swift to mind. Again he groaned, muttering, "Madeline, my child, what did I do to bring you among these savage men." The thought of her, alone, unprotected in the wilds of New France, should disaster overtake himself, was bitter agony.

Suddenly the bandaged features of the stranger, his sunny eyes and stalwart appearance, found a place in his distorted vision, and a sharp bolt of parental jealousy pierced his stern heart. "Perhaps 'tis for the best, but hard — hard," he muttered. "I should be pleased in place of being angry with him, but she is my one ewe lamb — my one and only comfort in this desolate place."

Aimlessly he commenced a restless pacing, up and down beneath the wide-arched vault above strewn with brilliant stars, shining as diamond dust on a velvet pall. The wind murmured in the pine tops, of dead hopes and a forbidding future; of a buried past, whose specter horror was suddenly raised to confront a man, striving for years to hide that shrouded figure deep within the vaults of forgetfulness.

His eyes sought the stars. Wild passionate pleadings poured from his lips, from the depths of an agonized heart, that his precious daughter might be permitted happiness.

That she might be spared evil things. The words, hurried entreaties to the Unknown God who ruled all things. Then he fell on his knees to sob like a little child.

Obsessed by anguish, as many another father before his day and like many who were to follow after, he forgot that in the yielding of a daughter to a stranger he was but following the sacrificial footsteps of every man since Adam. Though he prayed for a daughter's safety, he rebelled against the idea of relinquishing her to the arms of another. For he knew only too well that, though his precious one had but set eyes on the man in the early morning, afternoon had hurried love to her heart. That it was written, the father was powerless to prevent the lavishing of a daughter's love upon a total stranger.

"What blind chance brought the lad hither?" he muttered, rising to scatter the sweat from his brow. "And what blinder chance caused De Celeron to attack me? 'Twas little like an officer of New France — still less like him. Was it not enough he sought to rob me of my girl and had to be kept at a pike's distance; but that the sin of his murder should rest upon my guilty soul?"

Again he resumed his restless pacing, under stars mocking his somber mood with their twinkling gleams of hope, until unhappy thought demanded respite in muttered speech.

"'Tis not like him to drink," he said aloud, thinking of the young officer's sober rule. "He ever disliked my drunken reign, as he named it, of the trappers and the Missassaga. What should make a brave man turn madman? Fear of recall? Aye, that must be it. That alone."

As he stood deep in the wall's shadow, the door of his lodging opened. Madeline with the prisoner came out, their figures, very close together, illuminated by the oblong of light from the candle-lit room.

"Father is long gone," he heard the girl say with some alarm. "I trust he is in no trouble with his officer." Then she hesitated. For one of the chief causes of Captain de Celeron's anger toward her parent was at her side, and not for worlds would she have the young man think he was unwelcome.

He bowed his understanding of her hesitation. He, too, was fearful the storekeeper had come to harm through the granting of a night's lodging to a supposed spy. He was about

to reënter the room, seeking paper to make known his willingness to go in search of his delayed host — if needs be to return to the "pit," when — a blood-curdling yell murdered the silence of early morning.

The sound of a piercing scream as of a man in a death agony rent the air. Madeline, with a frightened cry, crept close to the side of her companion for protection.

In a second, pandemonium reigned within the stockade. Ferocious yells from savage throats, intermingled with shouts of soldiers surprised and taken in the rear; gasping sobs of strong men smitten to mother earth. Then the crackle of musketry seeking repayment for the silent knife, as the garrison bravely sought to repel the assaulting hordes.

Birnon carried the half-fainting girl inside. Hurriedly swept over both candles as he passed the table to lay her on the couch. In a moment he had barred the door and returned to her side, seeking to soothe her terror by repeated smoothing of a white forehead wet with the dew of fright. And she discovered a wonderful sense of comfort in the touch of his strong but gentle fingers.

The sound of hoarse yelling, the banging of muskets, filled the room. The young man, anxious to discover the cause of all the alarm, hurried to the window, peering out to the blackness with straining eyes. The pearl-gray tints of early dawn struggled with night. In the gray shadows, his vision began slowly to take in the scene.

Confusion appeared to be master. White men and red struggled furiously together. Flashes of crimson from firearms discharged at random illuminated swarthy features, painted with hate and the lust of slaughter. The stunning reports added to the turmoil. The garrison seemed trying to keep together, in the effort to retreat compactly toward the storehouse. Foremost in their ranks towered the burly storekeeper, wielding a musket, butt first. On the hither side raged the lean Sergeant, his short sword sending many a tall brave seeking the road to a last home.

These things he noted and was about to go, when a soft voice said, "I pray you, do not leave me." With imploring gesture of two slender hands, "I beseech you to stay. What is to become of me — alone?" He soothed her alarm with a gentle touch on a rounded shoulder. Then moved to the

door, the girl following quickly to hold him back. But pointing to the bars, he motioned her to secure the door when he should be gone. Cautiously he opened the wooden frame, stepped outside and disappeared.

The girl mechanically obeyed. With wild eyes she hurried to the window, watching his movements. She saw him run, trip, snatch something from the ground, then join himself to the little band, fighting for dear life's sake. And she prayed for him. Begged he might be spared, as he faded into a swaying mob of shouting, struggling fighters.

So crowded was the attacking force, each impeded the other. Indian wounded Indian even, in the mad onrush. One or two of the soldiers, robbed of their arms, seized an opponent, wrestling with frenzied force to escape a deadly scalping knife. Sergeant Pere shouted noisy encouragement, at times threatening punishment to each and every one did they give way and he live to know of such disgrace. McLeod, at his elbow, gave slashing blows, but silent he was as the very death he dealt to all within the compass of his flail-like arms.

Suddenly a piercing yell rose above the din and the attack ceased as by magic. The Indians melted into the shadows of the stockade wall.

"To me! To my lodging!" shouted the storekeeper, taking swift advantage of the lull. But, only eight of the soldiers succeeded in gaining the much-needed shelter. As the door was banged and barred tight, a demon chorus of disappointment rose on the quiet air.

Francis Birnon, in the confusion of the retreat, observed one soldier running toward the guardhouse. Without thinking, he followed; reached the door on the other's heels, to silently enter a gloom, black as the nether world. He slid on one side as the wood crashed together, and a harsh voice greeted his ears.

"'Twas as I said 'twould be; McLeod found his Missassaga tame dogs turned wolves," he heard Sergeant Pere say savagely. He was about to make his presence known, when knotted fingers clutched his throat, and he stumbled, fell, surprised by the sudden attack.

For a full minute, each sought the upper hand. With one supreme effort, the younger man succeeded in releasing himself, and rolled his antagonist over on his back. Then he

knelt on a laboring chest, as lights flashed down the passage, revealing Rose of the Hills, horrified, fear heaving her bosom to painful movement.

"Name of a fish, 'tis my stranger," gasped the old one. "Remove your carcass," he added in surly tones. "'Tis not my nature to relish the part of under dog." He struggled to his feet, aided by his late antagonist, who dumbly strove to apologize for a former harsh treatment. "Name of a fish," he said, grinning, "'tis naught. When I was at Brest, under Dieskau, every day we killed a friend as relaxation to break a siege monotony. Phut!" he ended angrily, "I am at it again." And swore most viciously. He was vexed to think the name of his former commander lay ready to his lips, too prone to prating of bygone days. "Light here," he called harshly. "We must make all fast ere those beasts come to their meal."

Rose of the Hills smiled. Not the faintest trace of fear was on her features. Why should she be afraid? The man she came to save was at her side, sound and well, and she moved about quite happy in a paradise where furious men waited to murder and secure revenge.

Together the three moved from casement to casement, barring their wooden shutters. Once, as they moved by a window, a whistling scream flashed near the girl's ear. But her impassive features never changed. Not a sign of fear did she betray, and the younger man patted her shoulder gently, greatly approving her courage. With a smile on her lips she turned, her dark eyes speaking many things her gentle tongue had no time to whisper.

Sergeant Pere evidently heard the sound of the bullet. Its noise seemed to startle his composure. A quick flicker of apprehension crossed his scarred face. "Name of a fish," he muttered, "an he smiles at this savage. Were it Madeline — now, I might find occasion to grin, but this Missassaga maid?" His mind was filled with doubt of the young man as he carefully bolted the last shutter into place.

"Missassagas come too soon," Rose of the Hills said with a smile, as though the assault had been an exhibition of mock warfare given for her own particular entertainment. "They bad men."

"Yes," surlily responded the old soldier, "my fears were

well grounded. Had McLeod—" He suddenly ended, his face flaming red at the forgetfulness of a friend. "By all the Saints, I trust he and my little cabbage reached safety." He turned to Birnon, anxiously observing the effect of his words. But the young man walked swiftly to the inner room, making motions as if to write. "Nay, save the trouble, lad," he said shortly. "I cannot read. Listen. Shake your head for no, nod for yes. Did McLeod gain the storehouse?" And, as the other slowly obeyed his first command, "Is Madeline safe?" he queried most anxiously, then smiled at the emphatic nods he received as answer. "That is good," he muttered and moved to the bedside of the senseless man.

A sound of wood strained to breaking point suddenly broke the grim silence. Of a sudden the pressure was relaxed and the noise ceased.

The Sergeant, silent as a shadow, slipped down the dark room, Birnon at his heels, Rose of the Hills not far behind. Sounds of shuffling feet, the stealthy movements of many men, penetrated to their ears, as they stood holding their breath, the thumping of their hearts audible on the strained silence.

Then the creaking began again. The old man placed one hand on the staple holding the bar. To his dismay the iron bent inward with the weight of tremendous pressure.

"They force the door, comrade," he whispered. "Wait." Then he ran specter-like to the room where lay his officer, seized a pair of pistols hanging over the bed, returning as silent as he had gone. "When the wood gives," he muttered, "we will give them a welcome they least expect." Forcing one cocked weapon in the other's hand, he ended savagely, "Back to the room, girl. We have enough to do. This is no place for women!" And Rose of the Hills disappeared without one murmur.

The two flattened themselves against the logs, Sergeant Pere muttering, "When the door bends inwards, fire through the chinks. We may make a hit in a target that will show red marks for many a day."

Francis Birnon grasped the saw-edged butt, determined his bullet should make a vacancy in the ranks of the devils without. Through his mind flashed the thought, if he was condemned to bid good-by to a fair world, at least one should accompany his journey on the unknown pathway he perhaps

was soon to seek. "Ready, comrade?" he heard whispered at his ear, as the crack in the bending door grew wider. "Now!" And he fired point blank into a mass of writhing figures, the report of his pistol echoed by the weapon of his companion.

The door shot back into place with a snapping crack. "Two birds winged," the Sergeant chuckled. "Two of how many, think you? They are welcome. I wonder how fares McLeod? I warned him. I trust he is safe, but I would that our commander were here to command. 'Tis the devil's own work this thinking and acting at the same time."

The old man grumbled his desire in no pleasant frame of mind. He was wondering how his little cabbage was at the moment. Devoutly wished his captain sober and sensible. Not a thought had he to spare for either Birnon or himself. As for the girl, she was an Indian and of the breed that comes to no harm.

As he waited in the gloom, fumbling at a powder horn in the attempt to reload his pistol, but spilling more grains on the floor than went down the barrel, someone whispered at his ear, and he jumped a full inch from the ground. "Rose of the Hills go. Find canoe. Bring help soon." That was all he heard, save the soft slither of a window frame raised cautiously and lowered again to its place.

With suspicious hoarseness, he whispered to Birnon, "Name of a fish, lad, but the maid is braver than most men I am acquainted with. 'Tis not many who would dare so much." And the other, dumb as the fish he swore by, could only grope for a leathery hand and in a grip of steel make known appreciation of the act. "Waste not strength on me, comrade, but when these dogs burst in on us as they surely will do then —" He was silent suddenly. He knew grim death crouched outside. So near that the dark angel's breath froze his soul. Brave as he was he shuddered. "When I was at Brest under Dieskau —" he commenced after a while to keep up his spirits, but abruptly ceased. The door was suddenly assaulted by a succession of thunderings that bade fair to beat it to splinters. "What to do now, stranger?" he exclaimed.

Without waiting for an answer he darted up the passage. "Quick!" he shouted to Birnon, almost on his heels, "A light." As the candle sputtered to a flame. "Wrap him in a

blanket. We must try to pass his body through yon window. We cannot remain here to furnish amusement for dogs, who would stick us full of pine splinters, and howl with delight to see us roast to a cinder."

They hurriedly wrapped the senseless man in a blanket. Tore the bottom and top into strips to serve as handles. Then extinguishing the candle, the old man softly clambered through the window, and waited while the body of his officer was lowered to his arms. Francis Birnon was at his side, silently. Then both peered cautiously about for sign of the enemy. Not one Indian was in sight.

"Now for it, stranger. This side at least is clear. What we may discover round the corner is another matter. Take hold. Move softly. We are like to pay in hair for noise."

The pair stole like shadows over the dust. Keeping close to the high stockade wall, they made its entire circuit without discovery. None pursued them, but the pounding of wood on wood, the noise of savage yells, was eloquent of the fate in store should they fall into the clutches of their Indian assailants.

"Name of a fish," the old man gasped, near exhausted with the weight of the man they carried, "I trust McLeod has his ears and eyes wide this night." Then they came to the rear of the storehouse, where they were forced to the open stockade to gain its door. "Now, stranger," he said, gritting his teeth, "rush it is. Lay low the minute we get there. Ready?" They darted across, lying down on the threshold, while the old soldier hammered with his foot on the wood. "We shall soon hear our welcome," he muttered, and a crash of musketry fired point-blank through three inches of wood echoed on his words.

"McLeod! McLeod!" he yelled, beating at the panel. "Name of a fish, 'tis I — Sergeant Pere. Open ere we be cooked on your doorstep, with the door for firing. Haste!"

The wooden frame was thrust wide, and a dozen willing hands hauled them, bundle and all, into safety. Then the splintering smash of tough wood, with yells of disappointment, rent the air. And the few gathered in the storehouse knew the guardhouse had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

"Blessed Saints," the storekeeper muttered, "we thought you dead with De Celeron for company."

"We are in his company," came the grim retort, "only we are alive. Though," this with a shrug, "he might as well be dead for all the use he is to us."

McLeod nodded assent. His black mood of the previous hour seemed vanished. All his thoughts were needed for the saving of his daughter and the soldiers from butchery.

"We will place him on my bed," he said, stooping to lift the inanimate man. As they undressed him, covering him carefully, "What may we do? Think you of the soldiers brave enough to venture to Niagara?"

"What think you?" was the grim reply. "Does any here hanker after Heaven in a hurry?" His companion shook a doubtful head. He knew the soldiers of the garrison.

Later they fell to discussing ways and means of escape. A hundred ways. All futile, because no messenger might hope to evade the yelling hordes outside. To no possible plan could they agree, save the waiting where they were, holding out to the last bitter end, but saving one charge of powder for the survivor sooner than he fall into the clutches of the red fiends without.

"He has not spoken?" McLeod said uneasily, nodding at the bed.

"Not to my knowledge," was the yawning answer. "If he has, I have not heard him. I have had other things to think on." Then the old man rose, moved among the sentries posted at every window. "Some of you will wake in a hotter spot than this if you fall asleep," he said sharply, as one man nodded at his post. "Beware of my hands though, they will make you warm enough before you start." With a scowl at the offender he followed his crony. But something he observed caused him to halt.

Francis Birnon, the moment he had entered the building, glanced anxiously around for the girl. In a second she was at his side, laughing, crying, in a breath; maidenly reserve thrown to the winds at her delight in his safety. He was dumb, but the warm clasp of two strong hands told her all she wished to know of his feeling. She glanced at him, blushed, released her fingers, but her eyes had said enough.

To the young man, her open pleasure in his company roused all the affection of his hot heart. She was worth the winning, he thought. As he followed after, he determined to do his

best to gather this wild flower to his arms. And the task gave him pleasure the most extreme.

Sergeant Pere observed the two seated very close together. And a grim smile curved his lips as he stood thoughtfully regarding them.

"Name of a fish, stranger," he grinned, "but you waste no time. As for you, child, 'tis easy to see you are pleased to greet one of us. Which one I need not mention." Then he moved off, muttering to himself, knowing they desired to be alone. He was more than pleased at the possibility of his romance becoming a reality. But found himself rather in the way. "Name of a fish," he scowled, "when I was at Brest under Dieskau, I always played principal. Then, no doubt fate was the author. 'Tis strange. I must be growing old and she neglects me. Old," he ended dismally, "and age makes sorry show in life to youth. Ah, well, was I but ten years younger."

Then he hurried off to assist the storekeeper, busily engaged in serving out supplies at the farther end of the long low room.

CHAPTER X

ROSE OF THE HILLS ALSO DISCOVERS A MAN

WHEN the frame of the window closed behind Rose of the Hills, she stood listening intently, holding her breath for sounds of pursuit. With two brown hands she clasped her bosom, fearing her pounding heart should dull a strained hearing. Then deer-like she sped across the inclosure, leaped to the platform, scaled the wall, jumped, coming to the ground with a thud shaking every bone in her frail body.

Again she listened. Crashing blows on yielding wood she heard, but no sound of her own discovery. Then she ran over the crackling stubble and gained the dark forest's sheltering depths.

Exactly what to do she had no clear idea. That help must be gotten, other French soldiers found to rescue her white man from extremity, dominant to a mind untrained to emergencies. Across the lake lay Fort Niagara. But how to gain it — how find a canoe to carry her there? Her own people were all concerned in the preventing of her plan. If plan it could be called. If a canoe was gained, was her strength equal to the fifty-mile journey? Food was unobtainable. Water too plentiful, but one must eat on such a league-long distance. To creep along the winding shore, out of the question. Such a sailing course would occupy days, and every moment was precious as gold to the stranger shut up within the spot she ran from.

The gloom of the forest held no frightful devils to scare her from her purpose. One thought tormented insistently. Had her people placed guards at the mooring place? Would the canoes lying on the shore be easy to come at? And her silent feet raced the faster over the narrow trail to solve the problem.

A falling star shot across the pearl-gray sky, the momentary flash a baleful gleam between tall pines whispering ancient tales one to another. "Manitou frowns on my errand," she gasped, pausing for a moment, a fearful glance cast over her

shoulder. "But I must save him. He must not die. Surely the Great Spirit will not set his face against me for my purpose to save a people from their evil plan of slaughter." Again she hurried forward, braving the displeasure of the only god she knew. Encouraged by a sweeter yet to her young heart a more powerful deity. One, whose name she had never known, but only discovered that early morning. Yet, He insisted on her errand. "I must save him," she whispered, her bosom heaving with breath coming in short sobs.

Out to the grassy sweep she came. Crept cautiously toward the lake, a mirror of blue black. Not a soul, male or female, barred her passage as she waded ankle deep into the still water. The outcurving shore was deserted. One foot after another she placed with such care that not a drop fell to disturb the silence. The jutting spit of land was reached. Her straining eyes peered cautiously about, seeking the mooring place slim fingers came to plunder.

A deep sigh escaped her. The canoes lay on the bank, hauled out beyond reach of sudden storm. Untended; not even a yelping cur was there to prevent theft. Then she passed from the water, crept under the shadow of an overhanging point, seized the nearest canoe, and —

"What does Rose of the Hills here?" a harsh voice said in her ear. A heavy hand placed on her shoulder turned her sharply about to come face to face with Senascot. "Does she steal a canoe to run from the lodges of her tribe?" Fear made her silent. Again the young man rasped, "Rose of the Hills was about to go — where?" As he roughly forced her unresisting to the high bank above, "Now," he scowled, "where does a Missassaga woman go at this hour?"

"I would go fishing," she whispered faintly, stumbling on the first excuse coming to a bewildered mind.

"With but paddles for bait?" the other muttered. The lie was too transparent. "Few fish would come to you, maiden," and the girl trembled at the glare in his eyes. "Come with me," he said briefly. "Were my father to know of this, his knife would steal your life to pay for such robbery. I know where you would go," he added viciously. "You would fish for assistance. Aid the men who steal our lands as you would do this canoe. Not while I live, maiden. Come with me!"

Rose of the Hills stood stunned. Despair raged in her bosom. Then with the quickness of a woman she recovered her wits. Determined to allay suspicion in the mind of the tall bronzed figure, by whose side she was forced to move.

"Does Senascot think to frighten a maid by angry talk of death?" she asked gently. "Where would a lone girl fly? Where find shelter, save in the tepees of her tribe?"

Senascot scowled angrily. "Maiden," he said sternly, "once on a time your silver tongue might have deceived the man you are to wed. But I have seen. Since this drunken stranger came to beguile your ears, they need guarding. 'Tis he and he alone you would save by the theft of my father's canoe." He halted, his eyes glittering with jealous hate. The girl shrank away, covering her face with both hands to hide a gleaming knife. "My father did well to beat your false body to the earth," he hissed. "He had done better to pluck out by the roots a tongue that would carry news to his enemies."

"He was cruel to me," she moaned, her heart plumbing the depths of disappointment. "He was cruel." Senascot sneered.

"Was I cruel when you lay senseless on the earth?" he said. "When the Evil Spirit clouded the eyes of my father, was I the one to pass on? When he knew not friend from foe, who watched you? Who cared, save Senascot?" His voice trembled, his hands shook violently as he stood over her, striving to search her averted eyes.

Suddenly she took courage. Such a tone was new to ears accustomed to the harsh marital relations existing between the sexes of the Missassagas. Perhaps even yet the man might be molded to her will. She would try. At all, at any cost, the stranger must be saved from death, no matter what befell her own slim personage.

"Did my brother Senascot join in with this mad attack upon our allies the French?" she asked gently. "Does he think in this manner to save our people from harm?" For she knew of his desire for better things.

"I was at the gateway—" The young man hesitated. "Where do you go?" he said harshly, for he understood she played with him. She must be taught a lesson. "Where thought you to go?" he ended, grasping her arm roughly. And she trembled at his change of voice and manner.

"I but go a fishing," she answered slowly.

"As I did and caught my fish," he sneered. "Come!" and he dragged her unresisting toward the nearest tepee. "Now," he muttered, "tell me your purpose. Speak, or my father, Wabacommegat, shall hear of this."

The girl was as a reed to his violence. Grasping her shoulders his brawny arms spent their strength until she gasped for breath and he let go suddenly, allowing her to fall to the beaten floor.

"Rose of the Hills sought assistance for a man," she found strength to whisper. "A man who is not a coward." And Senascot glared his hatred.

"Are you mad?" he said slowly, a new-born respect rising in his breast for a maid who dared the anger of a chief's son. "The Great Spirit clouds your mind. The white dog has bewitched you — stolen the love you had for me —"

The misery in his voice touched a sympathetic chord in the girl's bosom. She had discovered what love meant. Knew that ardent longing to have a love returned. And how hopeless that desire to her? More than ever hopeless now.

"Senascot is brave," she murmured, rising quickly. "He is not a coward. Some day love will pass his way and —" She hesitated at the longing in his eyes. If love was so much to a man who might soon console his misery by choice of another, what would future loneliness mean to a woman who dare not pick or choose among the few remaining braves of the Missassaga?

"Does Rose of the Hills love so much this stranger? This drunken dog who bewitches my father with firewater?" His tone was exceeding bitter.

"The stranger was not drunken," she replied hurriedly. "He is sober. The Captain, he was drunken. Lies at the Fort as one dead. Scar-face and the other men fight." She stopped suddenly at the face of her companion.

"You were there. Warned them," he said savagely. "You went there. Why, why, save for the love of a dog who will take the best from your body and laugh to see the sufferings of your mind."

"Rose of the Hills went there to save her people. Can a few fight many? We live on their bounty. Think you that none but men dream of the future? What will be the fate

of our people when the French, our masters, learn of this?"

The young man shook his head. Already, to his way of thinking, too much mischief had been done, but 'twas not woman's work to consider such matters. "Was it for love of our people or love of him you went?" he asked suddenly.

"Both are dear to me," she murmured. "The first I tried to save from harm. I feared the French —"

"As I do, now," came the gloomy interruption. "They are too many for us. Without them we shall perish — with them, now —" He ended abruptly, for the future of his tribe looked dark. Punishment he knew lay in store for them. Their mad attack on a French fort would cost much.

"Will my brother Senascot speak to his father? Warn him of the folly in which he persists. Speak to the young men, warn them also of what lies in store?"

The man sadly shook his head. With all the natural ferocity of his nature, a shrewd brain was his. He knew himself foolish now, after the hot outburst of jealousy had exhausted its flow. To what end revenge on the person of one man, if a whole tribe were to suffer extinction? Why had he allowed a mad passion to destroy his people? He thought surely that Manitou had made him mad, that by his actions he was an instrument to sweep the remnant of the Missassaga from the earth.

"What will my brother do?" she said gently, to rouse him from gloomy thought. But he had no answer ready. His heart was overflowing with bitterness. The maid he loved with all the passion of his wild nature, called him brother! Confessed her regard for a stranger. The thought was hateful, exceeding bitter, that a hated white stranger, one of the stealers of his lands and debauchers of his tribe, should also steal her love. He flung out his arms. Near struck at her as she stood silent, waiting an answer.

Could he lose her, he thought? Should he tamely stand by to see her body become the property of another? No! a thousand times no. Suddenly an idea entered his mind, causing his eyes to glitter. "Will Rose of the Hills give up this man? Become the bride of Senascot, if —" He hesitated, leaning toward her in the intensity of desire to know her mind — "if he goes with her to warn the French?" Then he waited, folding his arms, the girl stunned to silence by the unexpected

question.

Her dusky cheeks turned the color of chalk. A curious emptiness seized her bosom. Her heart seemed suddenly to stop its hurried beat, as she lowered her eyes to the ground that he might not see the misery in their depths. "Give up the stranger." The words hammered insistently at her ears. The gloom of the tepee a grave in which to bury sweet hope of enjoyment. The beaten ground seemed rising, as a faintness seized upon her. Could she give him up to save his precious life? Give him up to that girl at the Fort. That was what the end must have been in any case, but she would not have been on hand to see the happiness of the two. She shuddered as she thought of a future, chained to the side of a man who had no power to stir her heart-beats one fraction of a second the faster. The storehouse, those two, were burnt into her brain. She had dreamed of saving, but not of sacrifice. Never once thought her body would be its heavy price.

"Will Rose of the Hills do as Senascot wishes?" she heard his low voice say, and the color surged back to her dusky cheeks. Her lips near refused to utter a sound. "Will she do so?" he said again.

He came a step closer to hear a faint whisper.

"Yes," she murmured. "Yes, if Senascot will do as he says. Find assistance for the French soldiers — and the stranger."

Before she could grasp the full meaning of what acceptance was to mean, her slim body was crushed close to the man. His mad heart sounding loud in her half fainting ear. He stood, the picture of passionate possession, forgetful of a contemplated treachery to his tribe. He was content with her in his arms. The hated white intruder already half forgotten, though not wholly forgiven for an unintentional theft.

But the girl, having paid the price, expected her bitter purchase to be at once delivered. Gently releasing his clinging arms, she bravely tried to smile in the face of her future lord and master. "Senascot," she said in a hollow voice, "what of the Fort?" And his face lost its look of satisfaction. Again he was the practical Indian. Love and dreaming miles distant from the present.

"We must depart and that quickly," he answered readily, though a frown covered his features. "Food must be ob-

tained. The young men will not hearken to my councils. They would think I fear the French. When we return some way must be found — how I know not — to save them from the consequences of my mad folly." And his brain reproached him for his treachery, though his heart was singing with pure delight.

An hour later a birch-bark stole from the mooring place. Coasted cautiously down the shore, past the Fort where a great column of flame was blazing, and thus kept its course a mile down the lake. Then the bow was turned straight toward Fort Niagara, while four willing arms urged on the frail craft. Into the creeping haze, they, a strange pair of lovers, disappeared. Not a word did they exchange. Each had strange thoughts, and the weaker one went as to a funeral.

CHAPTER XI

HOW FRANCIS BIRNON WAS TEMPTED TO STEAL

FOR five age-long miserable days and nights, the little band of eleven men and one woman defended their retreat from the raging mob menacing their safety. The besiegers furious at unexpected resistance robbing their thirsty throats of much strongwater; the besieged weary, well-nigh desperate for want of sleep. Each day one long continued uproar of assault; each night an interminable length of fearful waiting for a stealthy storming of their position.

During the wretched hours every soldier did his utmost, save one. That one, their commander, who lay as though his spirit had departed, leaving the useless husk a mockery to those needing its once intelligent assistance. For Captain de Celeron remained silent; inert as on the night he was carried to his present resting place.

Madeline, as a matter of course, constituted herself his nurse. Her gentle hands forced at regular intervals between his ghastly lips spoonfuls of broth made from dried deer's flesh preserved in the storehouse for winter use. Meat there was in plenty, with hard biscuit stored in bags. But water was scarce. A well in the center of the stockade, the only supply of the garrison, guarded day and night by the savages. They, with cunning ingenuity, aware of the extremity of their victims, in broad daylight spilled bucket after bucket of the precious fluid on the thirsty sand before the eyes of the men and woman they tormented.

"'Tis their infernal cruelty makes them do such work," Sergeant Pere muttered to McLeod, as they stood at the close of the fifth day, peeping out through the chinks of a loopholed shutter. "They are devils." McLeod nodded assent.

"I little thought to see Missassaga wolves turn tiger," he responded. "'Tis enough to make a man rush out and sell his life for just one long draft."

Four squaws were busily engaged drawing water. Their lives were safe enough. White men could not fire on defense-

less women, though in the minds of several soldiers, their present task warranted a bullet.

"They are devils," the old man repeated. "Devils I should have kept well chained. And yet we were warned."

"Aye, I know, but I had lived among them for years and found them harmless. They must have had trouble among themselves. I wonder what would turn Rose of the Hills against them? What became of her?"

"She disappeared to warn our friends. At least, I thought that in her mind. 'Twas the manner of her going that put me in mind of doing the same."

"We may not stay here much longer without water," McLeod said slowly. "If she does not bring assistance, we must go under." And his companion agreed silently. Words were not easy. Dried salt meat with but a few drops of liquid to moisten its swallowing is not conducive to conversation, and he turned away to the farther end of the storehouse.

Francis Birnon had fared worst of all. At the serving of each scanty ration he had been forced to remove the bandages covering his mouth and by sucking at the raw flesh, try in some manner to alleviate the pangs of hunger consuming his once sturdy body. He knew wood for a fire, scarce. Madeline, making broth by the aid of bark stripped from the log walls, had on many occasions offered him a small portion. But each pitiful drop left over from the needs of the patient, was more than necessary to the nurse. With a determined shake of the head he had refused to drink, but, had the girl only known of his suffering, her lips would have gone thirst blistered ere she permitted one tiny drop to touch their red fullness.

Daily he grew weaker, hiding his distress under a jaunty air. His one thought, to save the girl from as much misery as was possible under the circumstances. Even Sergeant Pere, with all his careful attention to detail, overlooked the fact that the young man was unable to eat the provided coarse fare. In fact, during the intense excitement reigning during the last few days, no man cared over much for his fellow. Each one had enough to do in the caring for self. Now the precious water was at an end. Death by thirst was added to the possibility of a fiery doom.

The long storehouse faced the spot where once had stood

the guardhouse. A row of charred posts, some half-consumed boards, was all that remained to mark its former existence. The besiegers, furious at the escape of those they thought safe to fall into their hands, had fired the dry timbers, and a roaring column of flame speedily devoured the labor of many white men. Fortunately for the garrison, the little wind blowing at the time carried the sparks out over the stockade toward the lake. The green stockade had suffered a scorching for some yards, but the storehouse had escaped injury. Nothing else had been damaged, the attacking force were cautious. They had no mind to raise a forest blaze that would speedily bring justice on their destructive heads.

"'Tis a wonder they have not tried smoking us out for the pleasure of hearing us cough," Sergeant Pere muttered to McLeod, leaning against the wall. "I fear we shall roast after all, when they find we are not to be taken alive." And he cast a sorrowful glance at Madeline seated near the bed of Captain de Celeron.

"They will not burn good strongwater. They would rather blister their throats with the stuff. We are safe from fire. 'Tis water we must have, and that soon," mumbled McLeod, to fall silent as his crony.

The end of the fifth day was drawing to a close. Long shadows of swaying pines cast wavering shapes along the sandy inclosure. Night, with fear of sudden surprise, was again settling over the forlorn defenders, near exhausted with continued exertion. Inside the shelter of the thick logs not one of the garrison had been wounded. Strange to say, they had not seen one dead Indian without at any time, though they had poured bullets at them as they tried to rush the Fort.

"McLeod, we must have water," Sergeant Pere muttered thirstily.

"Aye, but unless God send some from heaven and we tear the shingles apart to let it through, I know not where we are to get it."

"As well wait on a miracle."

"Then we wait in vain, old friend." And a silence fell on the two.

Francis Birnon overheard the words. From a chink in the warped shutter where he kept a watchful eye on the women at the well, he came toward them.

"Name of a fish, stranger, what is it now?" Sergeant Pere said testily. "Signs again?" for the young man was hastily scratching letters on the whitewashed wall. "I tell you I am unable to read. Am I to shout my ignorance to please you?" He would have hurried away, but the storekeeper laid a heavy hand on his shoulder. "At every thought entering his head he scribbles. I wonder his brains do not rebel at such restless fingers."

McLeod paid little attention to the words. He was reading the rude characters. "Hum, and who will venture?" he asked. "Were we beyond the stockade—"

"What is there?" Sergeant Pere demanded rudely.

"The lake, at least that is what he means. One of us to go out and bring supplies. What think you of such madness?"

"He is not so mad save for his constant desire to write and so provoke me. Who will venture?"

"'Tis worse than madness to weaken our numbers," McLeod grumbled. "Worse than madness. Who dare scale the stockade with buckets in his hands?"

Francis Birnon eagerly pointed to himself. Then, seizing a charred stick, commenced to write upon the hearth.

"Name of a fish, but he is at it again, McLeod. What maggot bites his brain to torment his fingers to scratching?" But the other made no reply. He was eagerly reading the startling inscription written on the hearth.

"'We may tunnel under the stockade,'" he read aloud. "'Once beneath the wall I will try.'" He ended abruptly, facing Sergeant Pere standing with a sneer on his twisted lips. "Shall we permit such self-destruction?" The old soldier shrugged, as the three eyed each other doubtfully, well knowing the slender chance for the one venturing a race with death. "What say you, Sergeant?"

Madeline came to interrupt them. All three saw her lips were cracked and bleeding; knew she spoke with evident difficulty. "I need water for Captain de Celeron," she whispered. "He is very restless." And Sergeant Pere smiled.

"He shall have it," he said heartily. "'Tis as easy as shooting a dog Indian."

"Then I pray you to be speedy; 'tis not myself I think of, but him."

"Name of a fish, child, an he need a bath he shall have it." The Sergeant made a grim attempt at merriment, scowling at the others to be silent. "Return to his side. In a short while we will have bathfuls for all." He laughed hoarsely, thinking that the journey for water was like to prove one of blood.

Slowly the girl returned to her patient, her father following. For sometime he remained anxiously observing the features on the pillow, but not a word passed his lips as he returned to his two male companions. His mind was busy with thought. If water could be obtained, his antagonist might possibly recover from that death-like trance. A prayer escaped his dry lips that such more than welcome event might come to pass. He even smiled when the harsh voice of his old crony met his ears.

"Ho, there! To me, my children. To work. I have discovered a way to wet our throats. To the cellar, all that may be spared from window watching." As the soldiers crowded to the depths beneath the storehouse, where in a few moments they were hastily set to work, he said, "A day's work, and then a drink for all. At it my lads — at it."

By the light of sputtering pine torches, they toiled at the making of a tunnel directly out toward the lake. Birnon, first, swinging a mattock that brought the soft sand in showers about his bare feet.

"We may need timbers to support this child's gallery," Sergeant Pere said to McLeod, busy shoveling. "When I was at Brest, under Dieskau — Name of the devil!" he ended abruptly. Again he returned to his work, swearing bitterly. He had forgotten. "I grow old," he muttered. "Old."

"When you were there," the other said in all seriousness, "did you ever do the like?"

"Do the like?" came the testy words. "Why, we did naught else but tunnel under the English who waited outside to come in at us. Many a one of them we raised nearer Heaven than he thought to be."

"Then this should prove an easy task."

"Easy enough the shaft. 'Tis the weight of the stockade I fear. An it tumbles, some of us are like to lose the desire for water, that is — here." Then they both fell to work shoveling in silence, each wondering what the end would be.

For hours they worked, with Birnon foremost in the narrow driveway, when the storekeeper called a halt. "Within there, stranger," he called. "Let another take your place." And the young man staggered out to the coolness of the damp cellar. "'Tis useless work, I fear," he went on. "When 'tis finished, there are those brutes above to be considered. They will watch us as a cat does a mouse." The other nodded, was about to cast his body on the ground. "Upstairs, man. This hole will give you a chill your body will shiver to be rid of for many a long day."

Birnon nodded silently. His bones ached, his mouth was dry, though his tatters were wringing wet as if he had tumbled into the lake his parched tongue craved to taste. When he reached the gloomy room above, he cast himself down on a heap of skins. The instant his head touched their softness he lost himself in the welcome realms of sleep, and the storekeeper stood looking down with much interest on his ragged figure.

"He is brave," he muttered. "Had I been as he, I had not come to this devil's land. Perhaps 'tis as well he came. Madeline will have someone to care for her, should aught happen to me."

Silently he turned away to the torch-lit cellar where sweating soldiers worked without ceasing. Night or day both alike to them. They labored the harder for their toil that caused an agony of thirst only to be alleviated by continued effort. Every man knew of the plan proposed. One or two of the discontented regarded the matter as a devilish contrivance of their hated Sergeant, to keep them employed and out of mischief. From looting strongwater, one said openly. A fool's proposal, another.

Their officer, overhearing, caused both regret. He was a hard taskmaster. His horny hands harder still. The blows he showered right and left convinced the grumblers that if he was a fool, he possessed strength to enforce a fool's decision. Amid silence deep and surly their strenuous labor went slowly but surely forward, though many a vow of revenge was registered against the lean personage of the man who drove them.

The sun had long risen in a cloudless sky, when Sergeant Pere wearily climbed the ladder to rouse Birnon to a new turn

of duty. To his surprise the young man was nowhere to be seen. Madeline lay sleeping on the bed; Captain de Celeron had disappeared, and a low whistle escaped his lips. Quickly he passed to the other room, to throw a sharp glance at the sentry motionless by each window. All seemed well, and he retraced his steps, peered beneath the slab counter, thinking that the young man had chosen that more retired spot in which to rest.

Moccasined feet move shadow-like, and he made as little noise. To his astonished gaze Captain de Celeron lay on a heap of skins, with Birnon at his side. The latter's eyes were red and glassy with more than mere fatigue of hard work, their blinking stare set on a cup of broth standing on the floor by the mattress. He stood watching. Noted the hand of the stranger steal out toward the full cup, to be speedily withdrawn. Twice was this action repeated, and he angrily frowned. Thoughts of what this wounded stranger must have suffered the last few days came home to his mind with full force. He moved across the boards noisily upsetting a barrel as he passed.

Birnon leaped to his feet at the noise. His eyes searching the gloom to discover the reason. He nodded recognition of the intruder. Then wearily resumed his position by the side of the senseless man.

"Ha, my brave, watching the sleeper in place of sleeping your watch?" the old soldier said with a grin. "Art not hungry, that you leave broth to cool?"— offering the liquid, refused with a decided shake of the head. "Drink it, I say. No? Then I will cast it out. Faugh, 'tis sour. Wretched stuff." And he made a motion as if to empty the cup.

Francis Birnon leaped to his feet, his eyes glittering two pin points of light. One hand seized the cup, the other hastily tore off the bandages covering his mouth. In a second he gulped the cold contents. Then stood waiting, ashamed of his wolfish action.

"Ah, lad, I know," the old soldier said gently. "I should have been first to think of that wound, seeing I was first to give it attention."

"Sergeant Pere," came the mumbled reply, "I needed that — I — I have — have swallowed little the past five days. Mademoiselle would have given me broth, but . . . she is a woman and was worse off than even myself."

For the first time he spoke, and the other was impressed with the manliness of his voice..

"When I was at Brest," he tried to chuckle, though a suspicion of tears marred the effort, "we waited not on women. 'Twas every man for himself and Dieskau for us all." But his lie was a failure. His companion knew that he would have starved to a skeleton sooner than the veriest trollop of the streets should have known want. "'Tis every man for himself at such a time," he added quickly, and Birnon smiled.

"You will not tell Mademoiselle?" he asked painfully, for the keen air bit at his raw mouth. "You, a soldier, understand."

"Name of a fish, what am I? Tattle-tale in my old days? Nay, rest assured she shall never know of the hunger caused by my carelessness. She would acquaint me of the character I bear. Now, I will replace the bandages. 'Tis too soon for your mouth to open. I must to work, though my fingers be not so gentle as some I know of."

The young man shook the hand of his companion most gratefully. He knew the other understood, and felt more relieved. In a few moments his mouth was covered, the bandager keeping up a running fire of witticisms directed at the bandaged.

"I like you best when your tongue be silent," he chuckled. "I cannot read and you are dumb, so I may not know your expressed opinion of aught I say or do. If I might render your feet silent as your tongue, we might stand chance of water when the tunnel be driven. That is," he added with desire to tease, "if it fall to your lot to go. Mind, I do not say it will, for we cast lots as to that doubtful honor."

Here the other made a motion to tear off the bandages, restrained by the sinewy clutch of a determined hand.

"Foolish man. Never fear. You go. The soldiers will not seek to rob you of distinction. McLeod has his daughter to think on, and I am too far gone in the wind to venture a race with death. So, we will consider the lots drawn and the lucky one falls to you. Will that suit your craving to shine in a fair maid's eyes? Ah, I thought as much," as the young man nodded his satisfaction. "Then 'tis settled. The danger and the glory all to be yours for the sake of a maid I will not mention. But a word in your ear. Were I, say,

some twenty years the younger, I would give you, handsome and all as your features be, a strong tussle for the favor of Mademoiselle, though she doubtless is prejudiced on your behalf. Come, now I have eased your mind, we will descend to that purgatory, the storekeeper names a cellar, to taste a good imitation of what priests preach many sinners may come to in the future."

CHAPTER XII

HOW A SECRETARY SOUGHT SUSTENANCE, AND HOW HE SUFFERED

WHEN the good fathers of the Christian Church came to New France in search of converts to the Faith, they cared little for danger, less for hardship and welcomed martyrdom, provided that prior to such dreadful death, they had gathered to the fold a few of the forlorn sheep inhabiting the forest-clad country in which they had labored. But few in these comfortable days realize the terror of those gloomy wastes in which their days and nights were spent. The bitter cold of winter, the torrid heat of summer, the ever-present danger from savage animals, both biped and quadruped, haunting their trackless depths!

The four-footed beast slew quickly to allay the pangs of hunger; the two-footed savage endeavored by most ingenious methods to prolong awful death agonies, to appease his never-ending lust of slaughter and to prolong the amusement he discovered in the writhings of a victim. Yet the reverend fathers faced these dangers willingly. In fact, sought out and lived with the more cruel animal in his lair. By constant example they succeeded in veneering the savage with civilization. But at intervals, never fixed and most uncertain, the slight coating sloughed off, and the beast released from unaccustomed durance rushed into a thousand frenzies of horrid deviltries.

The Abbe Picquet was one of these good souls preferring danger in the wilds to a comfortable ease within the walls of some safe abbey in Old France. Periodically he traversed leagues of tossing water in a canoe, miles of troubled land on foot, taking neither care for the safety of the morrow, disregarding the trouble of the moment. By his untiring efforts many missions were established. So marvelous his zeal and the method of his conversions, he was of more benefit to New France than ten regiments of foot, and bears even to this day, the proud title, "Apostle to the Iroquois."

Now it came about that in the spring of the year, Wabacom-

megat, Chief of the Missassagas, wards of the French in New France, had despatched to this most unselfish man a request for a mission. His bitter enemies, the Iroquois, possessed many such institutions, and though they far exceeded his people in number, ferocity and cunning, he saw no good reason why his tribe should not be equally favored.

Possibly the debauched old man dreamed of an increased supply of well-beloved strongwater by the establishment of such a seat of learning. In the absence of scholastic favors, with but a small garrison to oversee and check his hurried course to drunken extremity, he could by begging, generally add to the scanty dole allowed him by his keepers. With a missionary enterprise greatly enlarging the population of Fort Toronto, he had visions of a permanent state, bordering on bestial unconsciousness, which was his highest ideal of life. Certainly his tutors were to blame in that they encouraged his taste, but while he was thus employed, their scalps were the safer. Drink was doled out, sparingly, to keep him and his tribe occupied, that civilization might secure itself upon his rightful inheritance.

The Chief had requested a mission. The Church, always eager to encourage and assist such hopeful aspiring, readily dispatched the Abbe Picquet to investigate the aspirant. Unlimited powers were given to the good man, and he, King's Messenger, Prefect Apostolic of all New France, eagerly set out from Le Presentation to do as he had been ordered. With him came his secretary Ambrose, and Brother Alonzo — famous for his skill in medicine — accompanied by five trusty Indians to act as guides. But though the journey was one of religion, civil and military interests were to be cared for. Reports were to be made of the state of the country; the garrisons inspected as he passed; such documents carefully tabulated and stored away in the archives at Quebec.

Fort Frontenac had earned his well-merited censure. An eagle-eyed inspection revealed the weakness of numbers and the carelessness of its guarding. Seated in a roomy canoe, the good doctor had much to think on. He feared his statement to the Governor would be disregarded; his plans for extending the boundaries of New France to the extreme western horizon frustrated by the slothful ease of those he sought to warn of a quickly coming peril. None knew better than he, of the rapid,

never tiring advances of the British. Yet his countrymen would not be warned.

With all his dreams of colonization, he was averse to the continuing of Fort Toronto as an outpost-mission.

"I like not the position of the place," he said one morning as they neared their destination. "Fort Niagara is in the exact situation for trade. Fort Toronto but diminishes its custom. And as was instanced by that Choueguen, our friends the English established to steal our furs and poison the minds of the heathen against their rightful masters, such place, I say, is better destroyed."

"I have heard that good white bread and wine of rare vintage is to be found there," the secretary mumbled, smacking his lips. He was of immense girth, with an appetite to correspond. "Much wine," he added, and the Abbe frowned.

"Ambrose," he said sternly, "I like not a gourmand for company."

"A man must eat or die, reverend sir."

"True, but to fatten the body at expense of the mind is neither manly nor befitting the company in which you travel. Pray let me hear no more of good white bread or wine of rare vintage. Read to me again the message of this drunken chief to whom we pay a visit."

The secretary dutifully obeyed the sharp command. He made no more mention of provisions, but his mind was filled with thought of their sweetness. Scoldings might come, but they did not rob luscious venison of juiciness. The autocratic Abbe was to be feared, but his displeasure could not spoil rare wines. And though inward rebellion raged in the heart of Ambrose, outwardly he was calm and continued a monotonous drawl.

The sun was hot. Do what he would, his heavy eyelids closed in spite of frantic efforts to keep them wide. Breakfast had been with him a weighty meal, and sleep was needed to digest its ample sufficiency. A half snore, his head nodded, then he was startled to complete wakefulness by a harsh voice.

"Ambrose, your wits wander. For the space of some ten minutes you have ceased to read. Your fat body would be benefited by exertion. Will it please you that I order the canoe ashore?"

"No — no, reverend sir," he gasped, puffing with excite-

ment. "I but fell into a train of thought. I was not asleep, just in deep thought." Exercise he dreaded more than any punishment his harsh superior was like to place upon his head. Hastily, with much attention to rhythm, he resumed his interrupted reading from the brass-bound volume open on his quivering knees. "I will turn back to Wabacommegat," he added slowly and the Abbe smiled.

"Wait," he said, turning to Brother Alonzo, silent but an interested spectator of scenery he had never before visited. "Good brother, you see the fairest of lands. Fort Toronto, where we journey, situated in a charming spot for health's sake, but in a bad for trading. 'Tis but a mushroom compared with Niagara. This Chief we visit will be displeased at my necessary decision, but—" He ended abruptly with, "Ambrose, it pleases me to add to my journal. Take a quill and write. Be careful of the ink. Yesterday's record would shame a school urchin of tender years."

Silently the secretary obeyed. On this occasion he remained wide awake. What he wrote demanded his every attention, for his master spoke of many matters far beyond his dull comprehension. Those same words even yet on record for the searcher to read, should he so desire. Burning impressions of the great country little known at Quebec, wondrous schemes for the advancement of its population, fell fast from eager lips, and the secretary thought his master would never tire.

But the brassy sun, high in the clear heavens, warned the energetic doctor that men must eat and rest, if he would have them work. With a vexed glance upward he ordered the canoe toward the sandy shore. A camping place was soon chosen. Fires lighted, and speedy preparations made for the noonday meal.

The secretary, with watering mouth and complaining stomach, sniffed with great approval the savory odor of broiling meat. He sat licking his lips, anticipation bringing a pleased smile to his fat face. Then the Abbe, ever watchful, came over to where he sat, and disappointment came also.

"Look you, Ambrose," he said, a gleam of anger in his black eyes, "'twere more fitting a man of your calling to mortify the flesh in place of adding to an unseemly girth. Now, while we eat moderately, you may read to us a fitting chapter. Not one word. I must cure you of this hankering after the fleshpots."

The fat man stood as one dazed. He stood silent, not daring to open his lips to remonstrate. He was intensely hungry, yet fear of continued fasting sealed him to silence. "He is lean," he muttered, as the Doctor walked to a stone, seating himself to wait for dinner. "Starvation would be natural to him. I will plead with him. He may relent."

The Abbe glanced quickly up. His secretary was desperately afraid, but humbly he commenced. "Reverend sir," he mumbled, "I trust my appetite is not offensive to you. I, to my sorrow, am a large man and require much sustenance to support its weight —"

"If weight annoy you, Ambrose, I know of sure and certain cure. I have but to order the canoe close in shore, where you may walk. I will keep a watchful eye that no wild beast takes you in its maw. Will that please you? You have but to say so."

"Nay, nay, good sir, I will wait — I will wait. I will exercise patience with my hunger, though hunger is a punishment hard borne." And the fat one removed himself to a more secluded spot, until the call for dinner. Then he opened his book. In a dolorous tone of voice he read. Most unfortunate was he in his choice of reading, for the chapter dwelt upon the fatness of the land of Canaan, its overflow of milk and honey, and his mouth watered as he stumbled over the words.

The learned doctor was a good judge of character. He had his own peculiar methods of punishment, when any offended his strict opinion. Closely he observed his secretary. Smiled grimly at his suffering. He thought the pains of mortified flesh might possibly effect a cure. For the fat man was a glutton and needed some attention. Hunger and thirst, to his own way of thought, were to be satisfied in moderate manner. The zest of the epicurean eater was unknown to him. Now was a good opportunity of reformation. His secretary must be taught a sharp lesson. Cured, if possible, of a most offensive habit. He smiled again as he finished his meal. Then forgetful of everything but the necessity of New France, he rose, walked with Brother Alonzo to the shore. There fell into deep discussion of ways and means.

The secretary, left alone, ceased to read. Though huge of girth, he stood in mortal terror of his spare master. Would without hesitation, had the command been given, have walked

into the lake and so drowned. And death was anything but welcome to a man whose appetite made life a long necessity of eating. But his master was given to fits of abstraction, moments when he seemed utterly unconscious of passing events, and those minutes were eagerly seized on by the fat one to thoroughly enjoy.

"He will never take notice now," he muttered. "Ah!" as his eyes chanced on a deer rib, well covered with meat, lying forgotten to one side of the fire. "Just one tiny morsel of that. Vension is delicious when served with jelled preserve and bread dressing, to which a pinch of herbs has been added, but the sauce of hunger makes amends for the lack of details." Then he stole to the fire, stooped to pick up the tempting morsel, stood blowing with fat lips to cool its heat.

"Ambrose!" he heard a dreaded voice calling, and he shivered in his moccasins. "Ambrose!" Again came the imperative call, and without thinking he thrust the glowing bone into the bosom of his cassock. Summoning a smile, he turned to confront the Abbe.

"I missed your voice," he said dryly. "Why cease to read? I was not far off." And the secretary was hard put to it to invent a plausible excuse.

"I thought little use in wasting my voice, reverend sir," he said hurriedly. "I — Oh! Oh!" he suddenly gasped, making a most horrible grimace. With a frantic effort he pulled his cassock from his broad chest allowing the hot bone to slide still further down. *"Oh!"* he yelled again in agony, and his master startled beyond measure hastily stepped back.

"How now —" he commenced angrily, adding in a more gentle tone as the painful twitchings of the other became more apparent to his eye, "What ails you? Are you ill? Is it serious? Speak! Perchance we may discover a remedy for your pains."

The secretary was silent. All he possessed would have been trifling to give, for the opportunity of being alone. Terror of detection kept him silent. Though his fat face worked with pain of his burn, he stood as if speech was foreign to his tongue, and the Abbe lost patience.

"I warned you against the sin of gluttony," he said sternly, and the other found his voice.

"Nay, reverend sir, 'tis not that. 'Tis hunger. Believe

me, I am better. Much better."

"If 'tis the lack of one meal that causes such contortions of both face and body, what diabolical shapes would come to you, were you to hunger for a week, I know not. Come. We waste time. We must be on our way." He turned, thought better of his intention, came close to the other. "See you be careful of my journal. Carry it beneath your arm. So!" And folding one of the fat man's arms about the precious volume, he forced the hot bone the deeper into an already sore place.

"Oh! Oh! kind sir, have mercy," the secretary gasped, then coughed to cover his confusion, for his master was intently staring into his face, a most unpleasant look upon his grim features.

"Ambrose," he said coldly, "that foul fiend within thy body must be exorcised. Brother Alonzo," he called, while the other stood foolishly plucking at his cassock, "my secretary suffers grievous pain. Have you aught that may ease him?" And the tall compounder of drugs eagerly hurried to the two.

"Reverend sir," he said with great precision of manner, "I have a powder to be taken in water. 'Tis famous for its quality in the expelling of gross humors from the body. 'Tis strong, but the sufferer is lusty. An he take my mixture, according to directions, soon will he be well."

The fat one overheard and shuddered. A nauseous dose in addition to his body pain was intolerable to think of. With an ingratiating smile he said, "I thank the Saints I am some better. In no immediate need of medicine." But the Abbe, suspicious of such quick recovery, hastily interrupted.

"You shall not play with me, sirrah. Mix the brew, good brother. I will see it swallowed. Haste! I am anxious to be gone." Then the man of medicine, delighted to be of service to the suffering, carefully compounded with a scrupulous exactness — horrible to Ambrose fascinated with the sight — a potion handed over with instructions to hold his nose while he swallowed. "Now," the Abbe said with a satisfied air, "follow us to the shore at once." And he, with the doctor, walked composedly away.

Once their backs were turned, the fat one plucked from his bosom the cause of his agony. Hurled, far into the under-

brush a juicy bone. Then holding his paunch with both hands, dismal groans escaped his lips. Already the powder, swallowed much against his will, had commenced a painful operation.

"Oh, my stomach," he wailed. "Oh, had I only known what was in store for me, all the deer ribs piled mountains high had not tempted my sinful appetite." Then he moved slowly down to the beach, groaning at every step. The Abbe waited in no pleasant mind to receive his appearance.

"If that fat body of yours move not the faster, I will leave you at Fort Toronto. I am wearied of such sloth and greediness. Push off. Too much time has been wasted."

The secretary dared not reply. He had said too much already.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW EIGHT DESERTERS CAME TO DRINK

IN the stifling heat of the cellar eleven weary men labored as those who strive to avert disaster coming at an appointed hour. Progress was slow, for one only might wield the mattock at one time. Twenty-four hours had joined the yesterdays since the driveway had been commenced, and Sergeant Pere, stripped to a lean and corded chest, his muddied trousers strapped tight about a waspish waist, stood with McLeod, as dirty, tired, and dust begrimed as himself, seeking a short respite from exertion the most strenuous.

"Name of a fish," he said with a wide yawn, "not since I labored at Brest elevating the English to higher things, have I known such desperate undertaking." He spoke indistinctly, his mouth dryer than the dryest dried peas. "I fear the weight will bring ten feet of earth about our heads," he muttered dubiously. "I am exceeding doubtful."

"We must take our chance. We must gain water for him and her," McLeod replied. He was not in much better condition than his crony. Speech most painful to his cracked and bleeding lips. "We must drink."

"I would we were come at the top," Sergeant Pere said. Then clutched his companion's arm. "Where are your pistols? 'Twill need more than my tongue to enforce the command that but one go."

The storekeeper stared amazed.

"Pistols?" he exclaimed. "What need of weapons here?"

"Name of a fish, have you lost the little wit God has blessed you with? Think you when we reach the top in sight of water, any command of mine will hold these thirsty ones? If you do, you are greater fool than you look, and I should be sorry to know that much."

"I have never once thought on such a matter," McLeod answered impatiently.

"Then think at once. Go! Load those pistols. The ones I have seen in your room. Return on the instant. 'Twill

never do for all to depart at one time."

"I thought Birnon was ready —"

"Name of a fish and so he is, but he will not have opportunity. These men of mine be militiamen. Not of the army at home. There, I could and would hold any under my command. Here, 'tis different. These forest men — poor soldiers on parade, the devil's own in a skirmish, when they smell water — they but obey me now through fear — will be as wolves at a carcass."

"They will not dare. What of the savages?"

"Fear the savages," came the sneer. "Little you seem to know the power of thirst. They would not fear the devil himself, did he come in person to bar their passage, with a whole company of his own to back him up. They have forgotten fear. Though 'tis but water, they will be mad to dip their dirty noses in it. Get your weapons, and that speedily."

McLeod slowly shook his head. Painfully he climbed the ladder leading above. Moved stupidly, as one lost to the world's doings. For six miserable days he had not removed his clothes. Had not had two consecutive hour's sleep at one time. One other trouble sapped his strength. Worry! Dread that the man he had stricken to the floor would never again open his lips. Doubt, that murdered peace of mind because of the harrowing thought of a beloved daughter.

Quietly he crossed the floor to stand with folded arms, looking down on the man who rarely moved. "Does he speak?" he asked of the girl seated at the bedside.

"No, father, not with reason," she replied slowly. "He raves of water and of this place. Sometimes speaks of me, but —" Here she ceased. Her sweet mouth was parched, her fair face lined with the care of her patient. Not only thirst had been her lot; the fear of hideous death, the lack of privacy to remove her clothing, had told heavily on a slim body. Beneath the coating of dust thick on her cheeks, her face was pale and haggard. "Father," she suddenly exclaimed, "shall we ever find water? I am so thirsty, so dirty, so tired, oh —" And the tears trickled between slender fingers covering her worn features.

"There, there, child," he said. "We must get through tonight. One goes out to try. Do not cry, my dear one. 'Tis little like my brave girl to weep."

"I am not brave," she whispered. "I am a coward, weak woman, waiting — waiting, alone in this darkness, with naught to do, save tend a sick man who frightens me at times."

"I would he were well again," McLeod replied, his voice trembling. "If he should die? Oh, God, if he die? Think you he improves? Speak! Think you he will recover?" But the girl only shook her head.

"I cannot tell," she whispered. "As I say, he but raves of water and of this place. Often he calls my name. He—" She hesitated, glancing anxiously at the bowed figure at her side. He seemed not to half understand what she said.

"Aye, women, women," she heard him mutter. "From the time a man is born until he die, he must needs call on them. Die!" That word uttered unconsciously aloud, roused him from thought. He turned to stare about in the gloom, one hand at his throat. Already the hangman's cord seemed fastened about his be-whiskered neck. "Not that," he muttered. "Not that."

Hempen cravats have never become fashionable, though many men of fashion have worn them at a last moment. Norman McLeod was anything but a coward, but the bravest shrinks from disgraceful death. And he, a plain man, had no desire to dangle at the end of a long rope. He stood muttering, swaying, and his daughter, alarmed, started to his side.

"What is it, dear? Are you ill? Shall I call Sergeant Pere?" But he strove to push her timid hand on one side.

"Nay, nay, I am better. I was thinking." Then to himself, as the girl resumed her seat, "Aye, thinking on my end. The death of a mongrel dog."

He knew his New France for an iron-handed mistress. Smiling, lavish with gifts when pleased with her servants; frowning, harsh, when angered against them. Loss of her soldiers without good reason furnished by the loser, a capital crime in her watchful eyes. The murder of the least one investigated, and the extreme penalty demanded from the murderer. Again he shuddered as he thought, and his daughter came close.

"Do not tremble so, father," she said gently. "See, I am brave once more. I will not weep. I was tired. Perhaps we may soon obtain water. Even enough for a bath." And she tried to smile.

"'Tis not so much the water, 'tis he. If he should die?"

"But he will not die. Monsieur Birnon says not. He has some skill in medicine — at least I think he must have, for every day he comes to his side —"

She was roughly interrupted. Harshly her father spoke, his eyes gleaming, as catching her arm angrily, he said, "Where is he, Birnon? Where?" And the girl ruefully rubbed her soft flesh, that angry fingers bruised.

"There he stands," she said with some alarm. "He is on duty. I will call him. Will it please you come hither?" she called and the young man hurried to her side.

He was red-eyed and sleepy looking; his hair matted and unkempt, while the dirt of six smoke-stained days covered his hands and features. Scarecrow he was and knew it. The rag across his wound emphasized thin, gaunt cheeks. His appearance that of an old, old beggar, rather than that of a strong youth in the early twenties. He shuffled over the boards, trying to straighten drooping shoulders, conscious the girl was closely observing him. A miserable sense of shame submerged his white face to a glow of color, and she, though he was unaware of the fact, discovered a wonderful sympathy spring up in her heart.

The storekeeper seized his arm. "Will he recover?" he demanded fiercely. "Quick! Speak, I say." For answer the other nodded, glancing at the girl who blushed the color of red rose. "Thank God! Thank God!" he muttered, tottered, to fall headlong to the floor.

"Oh, father! My dear father!" Madeline exclaimed, kneeling at his side. Then, as the younger man came, she fled to a near-by cupboard, obtaining a flask of brandy, and the pair sought by administering small quantities to restore sense to the inanimate figure. Their efforts fruitless as the moments hurried by.

Suddenly Sergeant Pere broke in, "Name of a fish, what is this? McLeod ill? Thousand fishes, to have this happen just when his services were most like to be needed. What ails him, child? Thirst? Well, we shall be soon through. We have come to the stakes of the stockade and the dirt falls in showers from their sides. Pest!" he added, as Birnon rose hurriedly, "I would not have this happen for a million gallons of water. No, not yet," motioning the young man to wait, "we

cannot go till it be dark."

"Is he to go?" Madeline asked in alarm, near forgetting her father. "Surely someone more able, not a wounded man, will be sent."

The old soldier grinned, as he observed the motions Birnon made behind her back. "Name of a fish, little one, of course an able man will be sent. Think you I command here for naught? Be brave, fear nothing while I am Sergeant. Look —" to distract her mind from the peril of a lover —"I think the good father requires attention."

The girl was anything but satisfied with the evasive answer. Then her father moaned feebly, tried to sit upright, supported by a bony knee that his old crony swiftly placed against his back, and for the time she had other matters to ponder.

"Madeline," he gasped, "where am I? What has happened?"

"Name of a fish," the Sergeant said, "you gave us a dismal fright for some ten long minutes. What caused the attack? Thirst?"

"Aye, that and age," came the muttered reply. "I am old, or at least on my way to age. Old!" he repeated angrily, as the three assisted his feeble body to a heap of skins, where he lay as one exhausted and glad to rest.

Sergeant Pere scowled whimsically at the daughter ere he answered. "Name of a thousand fishes," he snorted, "we none of us grow younger. And why complain? We travel in good company. The King of France is older by some few seconds already; we are all for that matter. 'Tis little use wishing to be youthful once again. I never found the hands of the timepiece move backward. Now, though I wish them to travel forward, will they move? Not they. As well wish one way as another, then. Time is the same. Here I am anxious to add a few more hours to the past. Phut!" he ended, seeing the girl smile, which was exactly what he intended, "an excellent preacher was lost when I turned soldier. Which of us keeps watch till the sun descend?" Then, threw himself down, yawning, on a bale of skins.

"Which of us watches?" he muttered again, closing his eyes for a moment's luxury of rest. He ached all over; his limbs indifferent to the commands of an iron-willed master.

Even the thirst tormenting his throat, second to that direful need of sleep. "Which of us does?" he muttered. Beneath swollen eyelids he noted the dusty rafters with their hundred and one pendant articles of trade. A sun shaft quivered misty notes on the swaying packages, and he was about to observe on the queer freaks of corded provisions dancing of their own free will. "The watch," he murmured, and fell asleep. Departed to the land of absolute forgetfulness granted to those who labor; to those whose consciences are clean as the soul of a new-born child.

"Poor tired old man," Madeline whispered, bending to kiss his leathery cheek. But her answer was a stupendous snore resounding to the rafters, and her father, somewhat recovered, testily bade her leave the old man alone.

"He needs sleep," he said. "You, too, Birnon." As the young man energetically shook his head, "Then see you stay wide awake. Madeline, you must rest. Sleep, my child, is what you need. I, too, for that matter." And as the girl with a lingering glance at her lover moved away, he added, "For the Blessed Saints' sake, Birnon, stay wide awake — that is, if you will keep watch. I do not think we are like to be troubled with attack. The brutes have left us alone all day. I do not understand it, but, we must make the best of the few hours' relief."

The young fellow nodded slowly. Retired to a near-by window where he could keep a ready eye on the stockade. His mind was filled with peculiar thoughts. Foremost, how did this man know his name? Possibly he had done business with his grandfather. That must be it. But why had he not mentioned the fact and saved much misery? Many things needed explanation. He would ask, that is, when water had been come at. When? he thought, and glanced toward the sleeping girl lying at the far end of the storehouse on a heap of skins. Would he ever ask? flashed through his mind as the coming journey to the lake drew nearer and nearer! Well — time would tell.

With an inward sigh at his dumbness, he placed a cautious eye to a chink in the shutter. All was unchanged as far as he could see, save that the women had ceased their wasteful operations. They had disappeared for the first time during the siege. He wondered at their absence. Then noted that even-

ing was drawing on apace. Long shadows lay across the dusty, deserted space of sand. Silence reigned save for the sound of many snores. It seemed impossible that the outpost had ever known the turmoil of attack.

Homebound birds sought their nests, while twittering swallows soared, dipping about the charred embers of the guard-house. A white-winged owl hooted mournfully in the near distance; bats wheeled their circling flight in the shadowed safety of approaching eve. The darkness grew deeper, deeper — He roused himself with a yawn, shrugging vigorously. He had near fallen asleep, soundly as those he was on guard to protect.

He moved over to the bale of skins. Placed a hand on either shoulder of the sleeping men. With a muttered expression of alarm both rose unsteadily to their feet.

"Name of a fish," Sergeant Pere said hoarsely, "but I must have closed my eyes for a moment. 'Tis dark, McLeod," he added angrily, and the other nodded.

"Yes," he muttered, "dark enough. I suspect one moment lengthened to hours, my friend. 'Twas light when we lay down, now —" and he moved over behind the slab counter, groping for a silver timepiece. "By all the Martyrs, 'tis eight of the clock," he said, striking flint and steel, making a spark that flared on three anxious faces.

"Name of a fish," Sergeant Pere growled, "to sleep on guard is a breach of duty I would be first to punish, but as none are superior here to me, I shall escape. Lucky for me Dieskau came not by to catch me or I should have descended to the ranks in a hurry that would deprive me of breath." Muttering to himself, he hurried to the cellar. In the gloom, he heard a concert of most unmusical snoring. With a curse he kindled a torch, and his loud voice roared displeasure.

"Guard turn out," he yelled with all the power of his lungs. And as the scared soldiers scrambled to their feet, blinking in the glare, he added, "Asleep all, and not one keeping watch? I will attend you." Then he proceeded to recount their several histories, as he knew them, and with reddened faces the tired men resumed a weary shoveling.

"If I myself sleep on guard, thereby breaking the first Article of War, 'tis no reason why you nameless animals should follow my example," he said wrathfully. "To your tasks,

or my feet will be among you."

At this moment McLeod, with Birnon, descended to his side. "Ha, stranger, art ready as ever to dare a journey from which there is no return?" And as the young man nodded, "Then prepare; we are near through, though I fear a tumble. One grave for the lot of us." He called the men from work. They, scowling, fell in line. "Remember," he said harshly, "one goes, and one only. Should any man dare disobey me, well he will repent his rashness. Now, stranger, a few strokes upward, and we find — aye, what shall we find?" he muttered, moving aside to let Birnon pass.

Into the narrow passage the young man moved; under the sharp pointed stakes gleaming white in the torchlight. Striking upward with powerful strokes, showers of dust covered his ragged body, blinding his eyes with stinging grains. Wedging his body into the hole, he persisted until he could no longer use his heavy mattock. At last, was forced to return to his waiting comrades.

"How now, my brave?" Sergeant Pere said in alarm, while the thirsty soldiers eyed wistfully his movements. "Is aught wrong? Will the pick not reach?"

Birnon shook his head pointing to the mattock in his hand. McLeod hurriedly ran upstairs, as hurriedly returned, carrying a keen-bladed hunting knife. "Will that do?" he said; the other, nodding, disappeared again.

Climbing into the sandy hole, hanging on by one hand, the young man worked desperately. Suddenly his knife stabbed emptiness. With extreme caution, he cut a circle in the roots above his head and the sweet fresh air of a silent September night swept relief to his flushed features. Then he dropped back into the gloom, hurried to the cellar, brushing by the others, eager questioning, his mind filled with thoughts of water for his girl, and vessels with which to bring it to her dear presence. Up to the storehouse he ran, seized on two clean buckets, hurriedly returned to the cellar, where a laughable sight met his eyes.

Sergeant Pere lay flat on his back, near smothered in a heap of dirt, swearing by all the Saints he knew and though they were of limited number, his curses made up in luridity what they lacked in truthful naming of the dire vengeance he would have on the heads of those responsible for his downfall. The

storekeeper stood to one side, doubled up with painful merriment, rendered incapable of assistance by reason of much laughter. At last the old soldier succeeded in regaining his feet.

"Aye, laugh away, my good friend," he said viciously. "Laugh on. Said I not that my men would be as wolves when they smelt water?"

"Oh, Sergeant," McLeod replied weakly, "I cannot help it. I must laugh. When I saw them rush you, fling you on one side, I thought of many a harsh word revenged, as they stood before you on parade."

"Ah, did you?" came the angry snarl. "Well, my time will come for rushing. When each pig-dog beast of them shall fill his hide to bursting he may split its length ere I go to relieve him."

The old man stood brushing down his clothes, furiously angry at the serious breach of discipline. Above all, he was most sensitive to ridicule. He knew the barrack room power of distortion. That the tale of an officer of New France should hold a crowd of laughers made him keen to be revenged before its relation traveled far. "I will have them," he muttered savagely. "He who laughs last has generally best cause for amusement." Then he turned on McLeod.

"Why do you stand staring like an idiot?" he said; and as the other followed up the passage, "Forgive me, old friend, but I am not used to being made a football. Let us go steady." As they climbed upward to the silent night, drinking in the cool air, he glanced suspiciously along the curving stockade walls. "'Tis strange we see no one. I wonder they set not a guard about the Fort. All the better for us, but, 'tis not like Indian cunning."

As they stole over the stubble, the crepitation of their footsteps sounded loud. Yet no one barred their passage. Within the space of a few minutes, they stood by the lake where eight thirsty men were busy absorbing mouthful after mouthful of the clear water. They two, not slow to follow a greedy example.

Sergeant Pere quickly satisfied his thirst. He knew the penalty of too much liquid refreshment, be it strongwater made by man, or rainwater coming from the distillery of a wiser Maker. He rose to his feet, a grim smile hovering on

twisted lips.

"When we return," he said slowly, "each one of you will have cause to curse his restless nature, and the insult put on me, an officer of the King of France." As the eight sheepish-looking individuals jumped to attention, satiated with the tremendous drafts they had swallowed — one, sickened to repletion, was taken violently ill — he continued, "Back to the Fort. We have work to do this night. Ah!" as the sound of sickness reached his ears, "pig-dog, you are already rewarded. Water is too rich for your stomach. Fall in." And the little company wearily marched back to the outpost; McLeod walking in the rear.

The old man shook his head in silent wonder. He could not understand this sudden desertion of relentless enemies. The strange silence puzzled him. He said nothing, though he determined at the first streak of daylight to investigate thoroughly. Setting his men to work, he filled every available vessel at his command. They had something to do to satisfy a taskmaster, suffering from ridicule.

Francis Birnon, before he thought of drinking, waded out to deep water, filled his pails to the brim, setting them carefully on the shore. Then he removed the bandages from his smarting mouth, dipping deep into the most delicious draft he had known since setting foot on the shores of New France. Refreshed, he too returned to the Fort. Carefully passed down his buckets. Hurried to the gloomy storehouse, where waited the girl he had grown to worship.

She sat wide-eyed, thirsty and tired. Yet when her lover handed a brimming mug, she held the water to the lips of her patient. He, supported by the pair, drank greedily; opening his eyes, to sink back into a stupor. Then she too drank slowly of the sweetest drink that ever passed her lips, tasting to a swollen throat as no liquid had ever tasted before. Suddenly she dropped the cup with a glad cry, to be gathered close in the arms of as ragged a man as ever offered hospitality.

Below in the heated cellar men worked as demons labor, tempting men to sin. It was not until the first streaks of a windy dawn came to rouse the earth to another day of toil, they were permitted to cease from labor. Even Sergeant Pere was satisfied. As he gave the command to desist, and the men

dropped on the sand, he ascended to the storehouse. There he came on a maid and man seated close together, absolutely unconscious others existed.

"Name of a fish, stranger," he growled, "where do you find excuse for theft of so much sweetness?" For the cheeks of each were pressed close together. "Which is sweeter, my friend; stolen kisses or stolen water?" The barest suspicion of jealousy made his voice the harsher. "Ah, I understand. When I was at Brest with Dieskau, I too stole both, though the water was of the strongest, as was too often the breath of the maids I kissed."

Madeline crept softly to his side. Pulled down his gray poll until his mouth was level with her own. "There," she said as she kissed him soundly, "now you too have tasted honey, and must not be vexed."

"I vexed? I?" he muttered with a smile. "I am too glad to see romance on the road to coming true in this work-aday world to croak at such wonder." As the happy pair lost themselves again, he muttered, "I vexed. What in the name of a fish put that into her head? I am more than pleased." But he turned away to hide tears in his eyes. They seemed to belie the truth of his emphatic assertion. He *was* glad — but — !!!

CHAPTER XIV

SERGEANT PERE MEETS FEAR!

NINE of the clock the following morning found Sergeant Pere well fed and fairly comfortable of body, though somewhat uneasy of mind. True, sundry tweaks of rheumatism annoyed him when he moved, but such pains were naught compared with the annoyance in his brain. He could not understand the sudden desertion of the Fort by its besiegers. Why they had departed so mysteriously, so silently, when success lay almost within their red grasp. Possibly they intended a trap? Well — he would venture out and see.

Sentries with loaded muskets he placed at every window to cover his movements. Then quietly unbarring the door, he first peeped outside. Found nothing to alarm the most cautious discretion. Swiftly stole to the edge of the wooden stoop, to stand with a scowl on his puzzled features.

Francis Birnon followed, pointing to himself, but he shook his head, pointing in turn to the gloom of the storehouse where Madeline lay on a couch at the farther end, wrapped in deep slumber upon a heap of skins. "Wait here," he said. "She would not thank me were you to return filled with splinters. Stay, and keep an eye on the men. 'Tis better that one should fall into the trap — if trap be intended by the dogs who have penned us close — and one only. We can ill spare that one for their amusement." As the other showed his displeasure by a frown, "In, I say. Name of a fish, but do you prove mutinous, I will rouse her. Then you will receive a most proper lecture, I warn you. Ah, I see you train for a docile husband."

He grinned as the young man shrugged, but rebelliously obeyed. Waited till he heard the sound of barring bolts shutting him outside. Then he crept over to the platform, mounted its height, to stand staring about, surprise keeping his tongue quiet for the moment. To remain unmolested was wonderful. That silence, in place of the horrid yelling of the past six days greeted his ears, more than he was able to

grasp. Shaking his head solemnly, he turned to view the lake. Suddenly his jaw dropped; his eyes opened wide. Hurriedly he leaped to the ground and raced back to shelter.

"Open! Open!" he shouted, hammering the door with a knotted fist. "Here is work," he said to McLeod and Birnon, standing amazed. "Out yonder, if I am not mistaken, is the Abbe Picquet. He comes here." And the storekeeper stood still as a stone.

"The Abbe," he muttered, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "The Abbe, and last month's books not yet posted. Now, I am in for it."

"Books! Books!" Sergeant Pere shouted angrily. "If any Indian lie in wait for him, he is like to hear a record not written by man, and that in another world to this. Guard fall in," he added hastily. "Four men remain here. The others follow me. No, not you, McLeod. Stranger, lie well hidden for a time. He must not see you." He hurried down the cellar steps, for he purposed going that way, not caring to run the risk of opening the stockade gate. Followed by the four, once at the surface, he doubled over the stubble on the run.

"What should bring him here at this time?" he muttered. "'Tis not his usual month. What trouble lies in store for me who am but a poor liar, with De Celeron gone in the wits, McLeod prating of books, and good reason to furnish for the doings of those misguided pig-dog Missassagas." Then he came to the beach.

The Abbe stood on the shore, surprise on a wrathful face, whose eyes slowly took in every detail of the ragged five. "Ha," he said in chill tones, "at last. Why am I kept waiting? I see the gate closed, not a flag to greet my appearance. Is the commanding officer dead that such disorder reigns?"

"The commander, Captain de Celeron, is somewhat indisposed, your grace —" the old soldier commenced hurriedly, interrupted by a haughty wave of the hand.

"I thought him dead. Ill, he must be, to allow his men to appear in such disgraceful manner of clothes. Pray, who commands — or rather, who allows such foul condition of both arms and person? Answer me, sirrah. At once."

Sergeant Pere discovered a numbness seize his over-ready tongue. He knew a fear that gripped his heart. Although

he had never the honor of speech with this powerful dignitary, he had heard of him. A soldier of the Church peaceful he was, but in the world of arms equally at home. His sharp eyes more to be dreaded than the sharpest gaze of any military inspector. The old soldier shivered at this dominant man, staring him out of countenance.

"There is much to explain —" he stammered, his usually authoritative voice taking on a submissive tone. "I — I —" he commenced, but was silenced by the other.

"Conduct me to the Fort," he said icily. "Command your — scarecrows to assist with my baggage." As a reply was forthcoming, "Silence! Leave explanation to your commanding officer. When I come to shelter, I will have his reasons, not yours."

Sergeant Pere meekly obeyed. Walking two paces in advance, he wondered if time would be allowed for that explanation by the savages he feared lurked in wait for them. Fear of this stern man stilled his lips. His civil authority, his tremendous churchly power, oppressive even to a military man, accustomed to command and be obeyed.

"A pretty state of affairs," the Abbe audibly muttered as he walked under a hot sun, that caused the sweat to start on his pale forehead. "I will use severe measures with this commander if he furnish not good reason for such neglect." And Sergeant Pere, overhearing, hot as was the day, shivered violently.

"I trust De Celeron will keep quiet," he muttered softly. "Half crazed as he is, he is like to bark at the wrong time, and have his hide nailed to the stockade as a warning to rum swillers."

The party quickly covered the short distance to the outpost. They reached the deserted entrance, with its close-barred gate. Then the Abbe turned on his meek companion, his face white with suppressed anger.

"What means this, soldier?" he said bitterly. "The door barred and bolted against the peaceful representative of New France. Why is this?" he said. His gaze seemed scorching to Sergeant Pere.

He was at a loss what to say. What reasonable excuse to offer. Oh, for five minutes with McLeod, that both might tell the same story! Why had his officer chosen such time to

dip into a bottled depth? Oh, for someone — anyone, to bear a share of the wrath of this stern man. Silent he stood, and the Abbe became impatient.

"Has fear of the Church turned your tongue to stone?" he asked haughtily, angrily, though he was gratified at the evident fear openly displayed by his grimy companion. "Answer me. At once."

"Reverend Lord," the old man stuttered, "I — I would have explained but you would not hearken. You were angry, though even now I fear the Missassaga more than your wrath —"

"Fear the harmless heathen who exist but on our charity? Fear them? Why, pray?" The Abbe stared his astonishment. That those drunken Indians he knew so well would dare lay hands on the least of the soldiers whose country provided for their wants seemed folly. He laughed quietly, but his chill merriment froze the hot answer rising to the lips of Sergeant Pere. "Fear," he sneered. "If you, a soldier, know that, you had best discard the clothes you wear. Find other excuse, my man. One more worthy of a French soldier. Fear! I, a churchman, fear naught save God; and do you, whose calling is of war, shelter yourself behind that which is unknown to me?"

Sergeant Pere was at his wits' end. Suddenly an idea entered his head. He must gain time to come at his crony. He would. "Shall I order the gateway thrown open to admit your lordship?" he asked, and his companion frowned.

"At once," he said, adding slowly, near sneering; "that is, if you have lost all fear."

For the moment the other lost his terror. Sharply he answered, "I had — we all had fear," he said. "And I will have you understand, that when a man goes in terror of death from brutal Indians, be he a Churchman who fears naught but God, or a common soldier as I am, who knows not what shape his fear may take, there is great excuse for him."

Again, the Abbe stared. A different man now spoke. Not the craven of a few moments past. To his surprise he had discovered a soldier brave enough to beard a Christian possessed of unlimited authority. Accustomed to meek obedience of meeker subordinates, he discovered a sudden liking spring up for this old fellow, daring a disastrous displeasure.

"That is the answer of a bold man," he said after a silence of some moments, while the soldiers stared in terror, each expecting instant imprisonment for their sub-officer. "Somewhat pert, I must say, but I will go deeper into the matter when I am admitted. Open the gate, my good man. Others of my company approach and I like not to be kept waiting."

Sergeant Pere hastily turned away. The sweat stood out on his forehead as he hurried to the hole in the ground and disappeared. His companion followed, staring amazement.

"Of all things," he muttered. "Am I expected to do likewise? Can they have feared fire?" The sodden earth caught his eye about the gaping circle. "'Tis not rain. The very stubble crackles with dryness. If 'twas fire, why did they not use the gate? There remains much to be accounted for, I suspect. I am anything but satisfied." Then he walked to the stockade gate, thrown wide by Sergeant Pere.

"Your reverence is welcome," he lied quickly. "Most welcome."

"How is it the Commandant comes not out to meet me?" was the sharp question. "His name is De Celeron, is it not?" Then the charred embers of the guardhouse caught his roving eye, and he stopped, frowned, said with a snap of steel in his voice, "Where is this Captain who permits such destruction of property? Is McLeod here with him?" And as the old soldier bowed low, "I will see him. He is a man to be trusted. I cautioned De Vaudreil of incompetent children placed at an outpost." Then he strode to the door of the storehouse followed by a shaking figure, who knew not what to expect, and least when to expect it.

He entered to discover the storekeeper with a girl, bending over an officer seated in a chair at the window.

"McLeod," he said coldly, "this reception is of the strangest. Different to your usual custom. This is the officer commanding? Yes? You and I will have much to speak of, young sir. I hope for reasonable explanation from you." Then he turned to Madeline. "Ah, my daughter, the air agrees with you." Abject silence greeted his salutations, and he turned quickly to the door. There was a mystery here. From the disheveled state of the three, close together, something strange must surely have occurred. "What can it be?" he muttered impatiently.

The storekeeper recovered his wits. Followed to say humbly, "I trust your reverence is well; has come safely through the danger of a long journey?" The Abbe turned swiftly on him.

"I am well as you may see," he said briefly. "But," and he laid stress on the word, "I am in need of explanation from your commanding officer. What ails him?" he asked sharply, for the man in question sat smoothing his forehead with vacant air and shaking hand. "Has he been long afflicted in this manner?"

Madeline came to the side of her father, whose face streamed sweat. She was about to reply, when he stammered, "He has been very ill, your reverence. Is feeble even yet," he added, swallowing hard at the lump in his throat.

He had received a violent shock from which he had not recovered when the Abbe entered. Now to encounter that stern stare, the steady eyes, was near beyond him. He opened his lips to stammer other words of welcome, but the chill voice asked, "I trust all is well here. I will attend you later, McLeod. When I have received report from your superior officer."

"I fear, your reverence, that for some time, I, I—" he mumbled lamely. Then blurted out, "Captain de Celeron is dumb. He cannot speak."

"Dumb?" the other gasped. "Dumb? And when did such affliction befall him? Are you all in league to drive me to distraction? What with a provoking old soldier who suffers from that complaint, then, when he recovers, becomes over bold and saucy — a captain who remains seated while I, the representative of the King of France, am forced to stand — and you, stammering, half witted — I am at a loss. I warn you, storekeeper, I am a patient man, as you know. A very patient man, but at this moment there is a limit to my patience. Beware now. Speak quickly, if you would retain my favor."

To emphasize his reputation regarding the possession of patient waiting, he strode up and down the boards with impatient feet. His violence, contrary to usual custom, warned the storekeeper that the Very Reverend, The Abbe Picquet, had changed not one iota of his hastiness since last he visited Fort Toronto. Then suddenly he had other matters to think on. The grim inspector came close, his angry countenance

thrust forward.

"Well, sirrah, have you thought long enough on an answer? Shall the secular arm of authority whip speech to your lips?"

"Reverend sir," McLeod said slowly, "your authority here to do as you shall please is unquestioned. I am prepared to suffer if unwitting offense has been given you."

"Then in the name of all that is wonderful, begin. Begin ere I am driven to violence." The speaker threw himself impatiently into a chair, intently regarding his companion. A sharp glance he threw at the officer, gazing absently about on all sides. The thought flashed across his mind this same young man appeared to have forgotten much that was necessary to a complete unraveling of a most mysterious happening. "Commence, McLeod. I am weary and need rest."

At the moment Madeline came to the side of her father. She had not really understood the illness of Captain de Celeron, but she knew her father was in some way responsible, and that his responsibility was like to get him into trouble with the Abbe. With flushed face she fondled one calloused hand seeking to find courage for her purpose. Then she said bravely, "Reverend sir, my poor father also has been ill. This morning he was seized with a fainting spell. You may see, he is not yet himself — the once strong man you found on your last visit." And the Abbe stared.

"Child," he said at last, "every man in this place seems to have the same excuse. One is dumb, one has a fainting fit. Is there one able-bodied soul in good health who may answer my questions? Is the place bewitched that all suffer at the same time? First, I am bewildered by a soldier disappearing into the bowels of the earth; secondly, the commander is dumb; now 'tis your father who is ill. Lastly, you, a child, attempt excuses for a man who once was more than ready tongued." He ceased for an instant. His sharp eyes caught sight of Sergeant Pere stealthily entering the room. "You, soldier," he said with a frown. "Come hither. What excuse have you?"

"None, your worship," the old man said, saluting briskly. He stood with his back to the open door. He was crafty even in his fear. Though he now found it impossible to gain a word with his crony alone, a nod was as good as a wink to those who understood. Possibly the white-faced storekeeper

would find some way to tell him how matters stood. Anyway he would risk the matter. "I have no excuse, worship," he said blandly, his features blank as a stone wall. "I am in good health and wait to answer any questions, to the best of my poor ability, that you may care to ask."

"Enough of insolence, sirrah," came the sharp reproof. "You presume. I am in no mood for jesting as you will find to your sorrow."

"The last of my thoughts, reverence. But will it not please you to retire? Refreshments will be provided in the adjoining room —'tis rather comfortless at present, but you will excuse the accommodation, I trust, if you will retire there. My tale is long, your excellence is doubtless weary, and 'twill take some time to set before you the strange state of affairs reigning at this outpost."

The studied pomposity of his manner, the extreme coolness of his composed speech, was almost too much for the Abbe. With difficulty he restrained a rising wrath. Suddenly he rose frowning, a light in his eyes that boded ill for the future of the man he considered impertinent.

"I will wait, sirrah," he said sternly. "Wait, yes, but you have a care how you attempt to play with my authority. Order my secretary and good Brother Alonzo to come hither. See to my Indians. And remember, soldier,"— the glare in his eyes was discomforting to the three —"remember, none leave here without my express command. And also remember your explanation is short and to the point. I like not a dissembler, as for a liar — well, you will not lie twice an I discover you in the attempt."

Without another word he stalked from the room, through a door held wide by a shaking storekeeper, and followed by the frightened glance of a trembling girl. The door closed behind his spare figure. Deep gloom settled on the storehouse; a silence broken only by the fitful breathing of three persons.

Sergeant Pere was first to recover. "Name of a fish," he whispered, "but we are like children caught at the jampot. Whew!" he whistled, and McLeod looked horrified.

"Be careful," he muttered. "Be careful. Once I knew him to disrate a Captain to the ranks for less than you said."

"Tut! Tut!" the old one said with a careful glance at his little maid, clinging to the arm of her father, "I have faced

Dieskau when he was wild. He was bad to cross when hungry and tired. A very lamb when rested. I will own this blackbird —"

"Hush! good soldier," a smooth voice said behind them, and the three turned as one. "Hush, call us not names. Dark skies hide the sun at times." And Ambrose shuffled across the floor, his weight shaking the storehouse to its beams. "Is there aught to eat?" he asked with a hungry sniffle.

Madeline quickly recovered her scared wits. "Aye, kind sir," she said with a winning smile, eager to placate this man who might carry tales to his master. "Good white bread and great store of rare wines."

Immediately, the sebaceous one became all smiles.

"Good!" he said. "Good! When I come forth from my master —" Here the three cast anxious glances at one another, noted by Ambrose who smiled benevolently, "Never fear," he said kindly, "I can be merciful to the unwary — that is, when well fed and at ease — I can be dumb on occasion. No doubt you are unprepared for us, but if you will furnish me a small morsel? Ah, I should greatly appreciate such favor."

"At once, sir," Madeline said quickly. "The instant you come a meal shall await you."

"Thanks, maiden. Thanks. Good bread, rare wines. Ah!" The fat secretary smacked his thick lips at the thought. He rather liked the idea of remaining in such comfortable quarters with so ready a maid to wait on his whims. Jocularly turning on Sergeant Pere, he said, "No more rash calling of names, my good fellow. Now, lead me to my master, and above all, forget not to have ready a small portion for me when I am at leisure. White bread and venison steak. By the way, maiden, I prefer my meat broiled." Then he entered the inner room and was lost to sight.

McLeod stared, as did the old soldier. The voice of the Abbe reprimanding his slow secretary reached their ears, and for a few moments they listened eagerly to catch the conversation. The wooden separation was too thick, and both sighed, giving up the attempt. Madeline stood with an anxious smile on her face, that gave way to merriment as she caught the whimsical look on the face of Sergeant Pere.

"Name of a fish, child," he said softly, "but what a weight.

I was like to choke with laughter at him. Had Dieskau had him at Brest we should never known cold. He would have rendered his fat to oil and we should have warmed ourselves at its burning." And his chuckles waxed fiercer, broken in upon by the storekeeper with gloomy face.

"I see little cause for merriment," he said gruffly. "'Twere better we took counsel together. Decide on some tale, and that quickly. I fear the Abbe who holds New France in the hollow of his hand."

Sergeant Pere wiped his eyes. "I know. I know," he said, quickly restored to his grim manner. "I should not grin, but this secretary does he carry as much weight in the counsels of his master as he does on his fat carcass?"

"'Tis no laughing matter," McLeod said angrily. "The Abbe is swayed by none. What he decides, is, within the bounds of New France. I fear his displeasure. I know him of yore. He is terrible when angered."

Madeline gave a frightened cry, covering her face with both hands. The dismal tone of her father, his woebegone countenance, led her to believe punishment waited on the appearance of the Abbe he admitted fearing. Sergeant Pere came close, patted her shoulder, saying testily, "Name of a fish, McLeod, but you are a croaker. Once I had respect for your opinion, but now it seems of little value save to scare maids. I too feared this priest, though of course I know little of his doings —"

"I say let us to work," the storekeeper exclaimed angrily, his face paling to an ashy gray. "Let us work and not talk too loud, either. He may overhear —"

"As I say," calmly continued the other, "I too feared this priest, but when I spoke bravely, as man to man —"

"He terms such bravery, impudence," McLeod interrupted.

"That is where we differ, then. Never fear, my little one, we shall come safely through. Your father has a touch of black dog this day. He could not see good in an angel from Heaven were such to come in his present mood."

The old man laughed long, but in his heart he had many misgivings. Tenderly patting the girl's shoulder, he passed from the room, and when he came to the open scowled about to see any hapless wight who needed his correction. Nothing was amiss. Previous to the moment when he had entered the

storehouse, deliberately planning boldness to the visitor in the attempt to avert displeasure from the storekeeper and turn it in his own direction, he had placed sentries round the walls. To the casual observer nothing appeared out of place, save that the charred embers of the guardhouse blackened a fair scene.

"Name of a fish," he muttered suddenly, "I forgot the Indians! There can be none about or some of us would be half way to heaven or the other spot. I am puzzled to account for their disappearance. Why, how and when those dogs moved off." Then he came to his quarters.

The place was foul with refuse, the bed tossed on the floor, and his few trinkets had followed the former occupants. Otherwise he discovered nothing wrong and speedily two men were set to work making the rooms once again habitable. He stood wondering if the nightmare howls of the besiegers had been anything but a bad dream. With a shake of the head he turned to see a tall thin man pacing to and fro wrapped in deep thought and hurried to his side.

"Reverence," he said, as the other nodded kindly, "a repast will soon be furnished in that building across from here," pointing to the storehouse. "You must be tired. We will not keep you long."

"My son, I am busy thinking. Food is very well, but mental excitement better. I have discovered a plant I thought only to grow in warmer climates. See!" he said, clasping the other's sleeve, holding up a withered weed. "What think you of this? Ha! Ha! my good brother Decimus was mistaken in his botany after all."

Sergeant Pere smiled deferentially. "I am glad to see you pleased, kind sir," he said quickly, "but I must to the kitchen. Hungry men will not be pleased with but plants for dinner." The other nodded absently. Already he was disputing learnedly with the man who had corrected his learning.

"He seems a good soul," the old man said, "though somewhat gone in the upper story. However, I have not time to give to his whims. I must to that croaker, McLeod. For the life of me I know not what tale to invent." He paused on the wide steps. "Name of a fish, now if I were a good liar. I fear invention was denied me at birth. McLeod will suffer if I do not arrive at some story, but what? What tale

will hold water to this angry visitor of ours? He is but a man —" Then he added, "I fear him though, I fear him."

He tried to whistle as he entered the storehouse. McLeod he saw seated with covered face by the open window, and moved over to him. "How now, man, moping yet? Where is Madeline?" But the other raised his features with an angry scowl, his sole response a muttered protest at being disturbed. "Name of a fish, man, one would think you heard your funeral chimes," he said impatiently. "If I must try lying I will, to save you — not that your carcass is worth the trouble, but there is Madeline to be thought on. Now, where is she? In the cookhouse, eh? Well, why could you not have said so at once, and saved me wind?" He turned away; crossed the stockade, hurrying at the sound of laughter.

CHAPTER XV

THE ABBE HEARS A TRUTHFUL (?) MAN

SERGEANT PERE pricked up his long ears. Merriment, after the groans of the past week, was something new. To his great surprise, as he stood in the doorway of the quarters devoted to the cook who reigned at Fort Toronto, he discovered a charming girl busy at the making of bread. Her sleeves rolled up above dimpled elbows. Lips smiling merrily as she called on her willing assistant, Francis Birnon, to perform numberless tasks he awkwardly, yet most willingly performed.

"Name of a fish, my child," he said, entering to stand by the bread trough placed on one side of the roomy kitchen, "where is cookie? Must you turn baker? Whew!" he added, hastily removing himself from the huge clay oven, red hot with a roaring fire, kindled by the assistant cook, "but this is hotter than our cellar in which we well nigh steamed to death. Where is the dolt that spoils good victuals?"

She lost her smile to reply; very anxious, and exceeding serious.

"Absent for that very good reason," she said. "I dare not risk our reputation to further anger the Abbe and his secretary. You know the usual bread we eat —"

"I do. Stone unless you make it."

"Then that is why I am here. His reverence must be pleased."

"I have ever heard it whispered, 'tis best to stand friends with learning, but methinks the fat one finds all he can do to look after his own wants. He, at least, will have small time for us."

"He is a good soul — has a soft heart, I am sure."

"I may swear to his soft body, child. 'Tis a mountain of softness; as for his heart — Hum!" Then he added with some trace of anxiety, "What is there to feed them on? We have no fresh deer meat, no fish — fortunately 'tis not Friday — and there is not one solitary liquor seeking dog to replenish

our starved larder with game of any kind."

Madeline smiled. "Trust to me," she said. "You go to poor father and keep him company." Here she gave her slave a gentle push with floury hands, hinting that two were company and three a number too many for the important preparations on hand to please authority. "Begone, sir!" she added in pretended anger, and he walked off, the first real smile on his lips for near a week.

"Name of a fish," he muttered, "I have heard that too many cooks spoil the soup. They are not making soup there, though — that is one comfort or I fear 'twould be oversweet. There is much sugar on cook's lips by the look the other casts in her direction." Then he came to the storehouse, to be impatiently greeted by his crony, waiting at the door.

"What keeps you?" he asked angrily. "From the expression on your face one would suppose a wedding invitation was yours in place of a command to tie a rope about your silly neck."

"The wedding knot and the hangman's noose are both uncomfortable. The last best, being the soonest ended."

"Sergeant, in the Name of the Saints cease foolery. Twice has the Abbe demanded your presence. Does that restore your wit?"

The old one grew grave. The mask dropped from his features. Into his eyes came a desperate look; the look of a man driven to the wall. Frivolity fell from his face as falls a discarded garment. Once again he was the stern sergeant of foot who had served under Dieskau at Brest.

"Name of a fish," he muttered, "I am at my wits' end."

"The journey was short," came the sarcastic comment.

For many moments, in spite of the fact an angry authority waited on one man's appearance, the two stood silent, thinking, scheming some story to account for the peculiar conduct of their officer. Then the old man snapped his fingers under the nose of his companion, saying with a wide grin, "I have it. I have it. The Missassagas! Where they are, where they went, what they do now, I do not know, but they shall bear the blame. They shall be responsible for his silence. They are not here to deny it. If they were, would be hard put to it to explain why they attacked us. Hearken, I will tell the tale — you shall swear to its truth. Come, we are safe

for a few moments. Let us in."

The storekeeper was about to inquire more closely into the merits of a tale that was, perhaps, to place him in the rôle of perjurer. The creaking of the boards at his back warned silence, and the two turned to greet the fat man standing in the wide entrance.

"My master, the Most Reverend, The Abbe Picquet, commands your attendance," he began pompously, but was brushed hurriedly to one side by Sergeant Pere jumping upstairs three at a time. "If it fall to my lot to deal with you at any time—" he muttered. Then followed slowly, leaving his half threat to be interpreted by McLeod, whose face as he walked, moved convulsively, ash gray in color.

He entered the inner room to find the Abbe seated at a table, his precious journal opened before him. The secretary busied himself with a quill pen; Sergeant Pere, stiffly erect, his face expressive as a graven image; blank as the clean page turned to record his explanation, faced the stern man, waiting impatiently.

"Ah, soldier," he said slowly, "at last. Why did you not immediately respond to my summons?" His piercing gaze near unnerved the old man and he repeated sharply, "Why did you not respond?"

"I knew naught of it, reverence," came the calm answer. "I was at work preparing for those who came with your honor."

"Enough! Proceed. Ambrose, take a quill and write. Now, I warn you, soldier, think well on what you say."

Sergeant Pere had need to consider. The excuse of assaulting Missassaga, so plausible a story outside under a smiling sky, seemed suddenly but a child's tale, inside, where sat a frowning, austere priest. He snatched one glance at McLeod. To his horror, the man seemed like to fall. Seeking to gain time, while his brain steadied, he said very slowly, "Reverend sir, 'tis not given to me, a common soldier of foot, to have at hand ready words with which to greet in due form your most illustrious excellency."

"Do you think to play with me, soldier? Leave such flattery if it be possible to your aggravating tongue. Speak plainly, ere I am tempted to send you in irons to Fort Niagara."

"As I was about to say, your lordship," the old man continued, outwardly calm, though his heart searched his boots

at the mention of irons, "as I was about to say, 'tis hard for me to answer in words to so honorable a personage as yourself, but, an you will have patience with my poor speech and manner, I will endeavor to place before you to the best of my ability, the suffering we have endured at the hands of the Missassagas, who for six long days and six longer nights, besieged us to the peril of our lives." Here he paused to clear his throat of some fancied obstruction, and the Abbe frowned.

"Rank nonsense, I repeat, that my Indians should have dared," he snapped out.

"I repeat, lordship, that they did so, and we found the danger very real. Only once in my experience have —"

"Of all things most irritating is an old soldier-woman," interrupted the Abbe. He began to see that if he desired explanation, he must allow the man before him to tell his tale in his own way. "Proceed," he said shortly, and as Sergeant Pere made great show of again clearing his throat, he added significantly, "The noose is a cure for coughing, soldier." The hint enough to induce hurried speech.

"Most reverend sir, on the night of the twenty-third — no, I am wrong, 'twas the twenty-fourth — the night of the twenty-fourth, because on that day I was spared from death —"

"'Twas something of a pity," came the dry interruption.

"As your reverend lordship is pleased to think — but on the night of the twenty-fourth, we having set the guard — Captain de Celeron having set the guard, I mean to say — we were interrupted by an Indian maid."

"Where is she?" came the sharp question, and the old man smiled.

"Patience, I pray you, reverence. All will be related in due course. An it will please you to wait until I come to that part —"

"Patience, sirrah, I am bursting with impatience. Leave details, or I am like to be detained until morning. Haste, if 'tis possible to your aggravating tongue. Haste!" And the speaker sat forward in his chair, his hasty manner causing Sergeant Pere to realize that not much longer could he spin out his story to gain time. "Go on, soldier."

"We were interrupted, as I have related, by an Indian girl bringing news of an attack upon this place. I informed McLeod — that is, Captain de Celeron —"

"Where was he? At the moment, who was in command?" The incisive tone clipped short the monotonous relation. The Abbe was keen to note the slip of the other. "Had your officer fallen dumb prior to the appearance of this girl?" Again he leaned forward to coldly stare, while Sergeant Pere found those two eyes disconcerting to continued relation. His narrow escape set his heart to thumping loud.

"Captain de Celeron was not dumb at that particular moment, reverence," he managed to say calmly. "'Twas later, when I discussed the matter with McLeod."

"An you discussed it as fully as you are prone to discuss matters foreign to the relation of the story I am waiting for, you had much time to waste. But I suppose, if I ever am to come at what you intend to say, I must allow you to have your own way. I will, for the present."

Here the tired Doctor of the Sorbonne closed his eyes for the fraction of a second, taken advantage of by Sergeant Pere to wink many times in succession at his crony, horror stricken at his daring.

"As you are pleased to say, reverence," he began again. "Though we had little time to waste that evening, I assure you. To continue. Preparations were made for the pig-dog savages, but they were on us ere we were ready, and though we defended ourselves valiantly, were unable to prevent the destruction of our guardhouse."

The Abbe roused himself to say, "You leave the relation of the most important part until last," he said, opening wide his eyes. "How comes it that your officer was wounded? How came he to receive his injury? Why was it he, and he alone received the only injury any one of you seem to have received? Where were you, sirrah? Drunk? Asleep?"

Sergeant Pere saluted sharply from sheer force of habit. The imperious air, the sharp questions snapped from thin lips, reminded him of the officers he was accustomed to obey without thought. Again he saluted, his heart touching the zero of hopelessness. His ready tongue stilled to dumbness; his tight-shut lips unable to speak.

"Dumb again, my man?" the Abbe snapped out. "Dumb at the most convenient seasons. Granted you all fought to the last as you would have me believe, and were injured — as I more than doubt, save in your imagination — why was your

officer the only man wounded? How came he to be stricken dumb?"

McLeod, standing to the rear out of range of the Abbe's eye, allowed a groan to escape him, quickly noted by the man of authority who turned half round in his chair. But Sergeant Pere was on the alert. Calmly, with a glance reassuring his crony, whose cause he was fighting to the best of his ability, he replied distinctly, "Captain de Celeron received his injuries in a desperate struggle with a more than desperate man." And the storekeeper gasped his relief, plainly audible in the silence.

"You hold much affection for this officer, McLeod?" the Abbe asked kindly. His keen ears had caught the sound. "Can you tell me who dared such madness?" He knew the man well. He would tell the truth did he know it. The studied relation of this grizzled soldier needed a truthful witness as to its verity. "You hold much affection for Captain de Celeron?" he asked again. And as the storekeeper started, was about to unbosom himself, Sergeant Pere jumped into the breach.

"Our commander sought his daughter, an it please you, reverence," he said quietly. "I know that I should be silent on so delicate a matter, but—"

"Ha! now I do understand your grief, friend storekeeper, and I grieve with you," the Abbe said quickly. "'Tis most unfortunate this affliction, for of course they may not wed until he be in his rightful mind once more. A pity — great pity, I should have been happy to officiate at such an occasion." Here he shook his head benevolently, but McLeod barely restrained a gasp of amazement at the bare thought of such undesired ceremony.

The Abbe, Prefect Apostolic of all New France, was to his generation something of a visionary. His dream, the colonization of the country he served with all the ardor of love by people of gentle birth. Hourly he thought of a proud generation descending from the best blood of his beloved Old France that should populate the vast silences through which he traveled. He knew the league-wide fertile plains needed but cultivation to become the granary of the world. And with that river of wheat pouring millions on millions of bushels of golden grain toward the old land, who among the nations of the world could dare resist the mighty, inexhaustible power drawn from that

glistening stream of wealth? What country had ever possessed such a banker this New France would prove, under proper colonization, cultivation and kind attention?

He sat lost in thought at the magnitude of the schemes his busy brain invented. The future became the present to his vivid imagination. The scanty population grew to millions; wheat rolled in one continuous stream toward the east; cities rose; the land blossomed like some fair garden, and he had been called to receive his well won meed of praise and merit. The touch of a king's hand upon his arm —

He roused himself to respond, finding his secretary timidly placing one shaking finger on his elbow. "Will it please your reverence that the examination be at an end?" he heard the fat one sniffle. In a moment he was wide awake. Dreaming done. Business of the moment needed practical attention.

"Ah, I had near forgotten," he said harshly. "Where were we? Proceed, soldier. Proceed!" And Sergeant Pere's hopes of forgetfulness of the matter in hand were dashed crippled to the earth. "Proceed, I say."

"Where shall I commence, reverence," he asked slowly. "I have lost the thread of my story."

The secretary, anxious to please his master, drawled out solemnly, "Captain de Celeron received his injury at the hands of a desperate man." He ended, with a pompous glance at the old man, who stared viciously at him for the space of some five seconds.

"Ah, just so," interjected the Abbe, now fully wide eyed and alert. "Would you know that man again, soldier?"

"'Twas dark, sir — dark as a wolf's throat. I could not discern his features during the struggle. When 'twas light, my officer lay senseless on the floor, and my hands were full."

"No doubt. Then you are certain you would not know him again? Set down his reply, Ambrose. The exact words. Now, soldier."

Again the old man hesitated. He could almost feel the storekeeper shaking in his boots. He gulped hard at the lie, then answered sturdily, "No, reverend sir, I would not. When 'twas light enough, McLeod and, and myself were the only three in the guardhouse."

"Too bad he escaped. However, I presume you did your duty? Proceed."

"Then, reverence, the assault took place. Scores of yelling savages beset us. We retreated here. Held it against innumerable attacks until water was gone and hope with it. We were forced as a last desperate chance to tunnel out for water —"

"That accounts for the hole that so puzzled me," the Abbe exclaimed, his eyes half closing with fatigue, a satisfied air on his features. And Sergeant Pere congratulated himself on having turned the corner of an exceedingly nasty road successfully, and with some credit. He was startled by the next question falling from the lips of his questioner; one that made him pause ere he committed himself to an answer. "Would you know those savages again?" He wondered if he would. "If 'twas dark during those wonderful relations of yours, you may be in error. May asperse my Missassagas. Where live these wild savages who assault Fort Toronto, to disappear the moment of my arrival?" With half a sneer, "Imagination, soldier?"

"'Twas not imagination, your lordship," the other answered with some heat. "You may see for yourself, many a bullet hole in the wood."

"Ah, well, wood is not easily injured, my good man." Here the Abbe rose suddenly, came close, to say harshly, "Hearken, my sergeant of foot, I like not the story you have found such difficulty in relating. Though I am forced from circumstances to permit you in command here, do not think I am a child to be played with. You and this storekeeper — I know him of yore a truthful man — have had some dealings together. That much is evident. As I said, he was once truthful, and honest, though at present he keeps company with one who is like to change his reputation. You two have seen some strange dealings — I am not certain of what they were. If for one moment I prove you have deceived me — well, enough on that subject. You will repent, soldier, I assure you. Now, command those Missassagas to appear before me to-morrow. In the stockade. Their chief may enlighten me as to what *you* were about, the night he attacked this place." Without another word he turned, strode from the room followed by his secretary.

Bewildered as he was at the order, Sergeant Pere retained sufficient soldier sense to salute. For the life of him he could not have replied obeyance by word of mouth. The startling order took away his breath. His scalp seemed to creep with a

new sense of parting. The hand at his glazed cap trembled with something near akin to fear. Then McLeod stole silently to his side and the pair moved out to the open, staring wonderment into each other's eyes.

"Is he raving mad?" the Sergeant said after a long silence. "Gather together a howling mob of wolves as though they were a drove of innocent sheep? What manner of man is he? Think you he is—" Here he touched his forehead significantly. But the other shook a gloomy head.

"No keener brain exists in all New France," was his serious response. "Did I not warn you he was terrible?"

"Terrible! yes, to some, but not to me. Did I not fool him properly, and I did not lie—save once."

McLeod shivered. Caught at the shoulder of the other with some violence. "Swear to me," he said, "that should he discover the truth of how you made sport of him—why Captain de Celeron was unable to protect this place—that you will take the child and fly from here. For me, there is little hope. He will hold me strictly to account. I know it."

"How in the name of a fish is he to come at the truth? He tarries here for no other purpose than to address his pets." Here Sergeant Pere hesitated. He wondered whether his given task would be successful. "Name of ten thousand devil fish," he muttered angrily, "I may wear less hair to-morrow, do I find those tame ones he prates of." And he ruefully rubbed his bald cranium where little enough gray thatch remained. Barely sufficient to tempt any save a savage to the labor of removing the remnants of a long-departed crown of glory.

"He is far from satisfied," McLeod said slowly. "He but gives you—us—time to catch us tripping, and then—"

"Did I vex my mind with such thoughts as ramble through your brain, I would soon be in my last six feet of earth. Come! we are not yet hung—"

"To-morrow may see us reaching for the earth at the end of a rope," came the frowning reply, and the other scowled.

"Well, we do not dance to-night, if that console you," he said. "Come! let us to work. Shake off this gloom. The hemp is not planted that will stretch our necks."

He passed one arm about the shoulders of his crony. Even attempted a dismal croaking intended for a song, harsh enough to call forth approval from a hungry dog smelling the feast.

But all his efforts to enliven the other were unavailing. McLeod was as a man traveling in the dark. Never a jovial character, the sudden appearance of the Abbe drowned him in a sea of melancholy, whose turbid waters threatened to end his life. Sergeant Pere gave up the attempted merriment. With a determined effort threw off his own forebodings. Leaving his crony pacing the stockade he sought his little cabbage, flinging himself into a bustle of preparation with right good will.

When at the end of two hours a feast fit for a prince groaned on long tables spread in the storehouse, and the Abbe with Brother Alonzo had sparingly regaled their appetites, he sought Madeline, seated on the wide stoop. "Name of a fish, little one, where did you find such provender?" he asked with a wide grin.

"There was flour in plenty, with venison dried in abundance. I had but to make pasties. The corn, Monsieur Birnon gathered from that patch behind the Fort. I trust the Abbe is satisfied?"

The old man smiled down at her flushed face. "Name of all cooks," he said with intent to tease, "do you succeed as a wife one half so well as you do a cook, the stranger has discovered a treasure many men would die to possess. He will possess you?" he added, and she blushed, though gathering twilight prevented the other from discovering his random shot had scored heavily on the target of her affection.

"I trust him to you," she murmured softly. "He is very dear to me."

"I will not allow such treasure to go unattended," Sergeant Pere answered as softly, squeezing her fingers. Then discovering his eyes obscured by a moisture, he swore at their weakness, as he walked over to order the guards relieved.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW ONE SOLDIER RECOVERED SEVEN

SERGEANT PERE, in the privacy of his renovated quarters, sprawled full length on a rustling corn-husk mattress. The long wooden pipe puffed at contentedly, occasionally removed from his mouth, allowed volumes of smoke and many chuckles to rise from wide lips. His uniform was hung carefully on a wooden peg. For he wore a woodsman's clothes, and their tight-fitting scantiness revealed a most attenuated shape.

"Name of a fish," he smiled sourly, "did he suspect the tale I told to be first cousin to a lie, I should sweat drops of blood for such insolence. I think I have him though. Since supper he has not said one word to me — though McLeod, I suspect, is catching it finely about his bookkeeping. He has been there long. 'Tis time he came to me." And a scowl settled on his forehead at the thought.

Suddenly the door opened, and the man he muttered of entered, pale, haggard, and white lipped. He came to the bedside, and as he spoke his voice trembled with excitement.

"Sergeant," he said quickly, "he is a fearful one to handle. I have been with him four mortal hours, worried by questions as to what I have done in the matter of trade. What think you he told me?"

"If you mean his lordship, I should say, that you were keeping company with a dissolute sergeant of foot; that you were likely to lose what little honesty you were possessed of at birth; that —"

"Cease, for the love of the Saints, man," the other burst out. "He told me the Brother who came with him was a skilled man of medicine. That he held out hope of restoring Captain de Celeron to speech! Now, what have you to say?"

Sergeant Pere jumped from the bed. Stared silently for one moment. Then he stretched his long arms, and placed a chair. "Why all this to do?" he asked calmly. "Did I not settle matters to your liking?"

"That was to-day — this morning. For a time only —"

"Let to-morrow care for itself, then."

"You forget Captain de Celeron may speak."

"I shall remember if he does. Now, tell me, how came he to recover in such quick manner? I came near falling dead with fright to see him when I entered to admit blackrobe —"

"Hush! Hush!" McLeod said, starting to his feet, listening for the sound of eavesdropping footsteps. "Oh, what fools some men be," he added, wearily dropping back into the chair, wiping the sweat streaming from a white forehead.

"We are all brothers in that respect, McLeod. A fool I am to be here, a greater fool to admit to my quarters a more fearful fool. One would think to hear your voice that this governor-doctor-priest, or whatever be his righteous title, possessed you both body and soul."

"He does, as he does yours — as he does every man's within the limits of his jurisdiction. He is all powerful in this place, all powerful."

"Name of a fish, do I question his authority?" came the testy question. "I know he is officer of New France, but so am I. To do me harm he must prove good cause of offense against me."

"If he but knew, he has that to hand already."

"Yes, but he is ignorant. What may he do on suspicion? You said naught to him, I hope?"

"No, though I feared that he would question me as he did you. I know him. You do not. 'Tis easy to be brave when one is ignorant. If he find your tale thin in the web, he is like to change the pattern of the clothes you wear. That in a hurry."

"No doubt he is a skilled weaver, but I told him truth — at least 'twas so after a fashion, and whatever he is, he cannot change the thread of my existence."

"No," came the fearful reply, "but he may cut it short."

"Then if he does, my time is come and I have yet to know the fear of death."

McLeod rose from his chair, to stare into deep steady eyes. "There be others to think on, my friend," he whispered. "Others. A man may not fear his own end, but he may fear the consequences of that end to friends he is forced to leave behind." And the Sergeant scowled.

"True. True," he mused, "Too much truth to please me at the moment. But I repeat, I am not frightened of this old bird —"

"For the love of us all have a care," McLeod interrupted. "You know not who may be set to spy on us. Call him what you please, when you please, but for the love of the Blessed Saints, wait until I am absent." And his fear was evident by the hurried manner in which he crossed the room to peer out to a starlit night.

"Oh, I will be careful," the other almost sneered, as with near a glance of contempt he struck spark from flint and steel to light a forgotten pipe. "Now tell me," he went on, motioning his companion to his side, "tell me how De Celeron came to be standing at the window, white as a ghost seeking a spot to hide from the sun."

"He wakened from deep sleep, rose from his bed, looked about him in surprise, then moved to where you saw him. I sent Madeline from the room, dressed him in his uniform, and that is all."

"Enough, too. He made my heart seek my mouth, and it has not sought that place since I sought to dodge my first bullet. How knew you he was dumb?"

"Madeline spoke to him, but he stared vacantly. Shook his head, making noises in his throat. Then he moved to the window. Sat there waiting until you entered."

"I trust he waits till the Abbe be gone ere he opens his mouth," came the dry response. "'Twill not matter much what he says when they have all departed."

"Pray God they go soon," McLeod spoke devoutly, and his crony grinned.

"I second that prayer, friend. Now if this doctor black-robe — Do not be alarmed," he said half angrily as the other started, "none can hear us. Now, should speech be restored to our Captain, we shall be in a tight place. For myself," here he shrugged with careless affectation, "it means but a trifle of a beating — for you, a tongue thrashing from the Abbe, which you will not forget. For Madeline, naught." He hesitated thinking of Birnon. "Name of a fish," he said, "I had clean forgotten the stranger. If he be found, for him it means a rope."

He jumped to his feet. With bent brows strode the narrow

room. Here was one point he had altogether forgotten. How was this wounded man to be accounted for? If Captain de Celeron regained speech, his first remembrance would be of the one who had crossed his path in love. That much the old soldier was very sure of, and his knitted brows scowled horribly. "'Twas well I sent him down the lake," he muttered. "He has food and weapons, but if we are detained, will he return in search of the little one? From what I know of him he will not be content to leave us to our fate." And the plans he had gloated over seemed gone very far astray. He was about to mention his uneasiness. A glance at the frightened features opposite hinted caution and he endeavored to hide the disquiet gnawing at his heart. "You doubtless thought I was at my wits' end," he smiled. "Thought priests were wiser than soldiers?"

"I cannot think, Sergeant. I am not the man I once was."

"Listen. Birnon lies concealed down the lake with a canoe. Does Captain de Celeron recover, and we have hint of it, we shall soon be after him."

"By all the Saints you surpass me," McLeod whispered brokenly. "Thank the Blessed Mary for that slight chance of escape." He covered his face with two shaking hands that revealed how a once strong man, broken spirited, came near to becoming a coward for the sake of a woman.

The old man grinned widely, but in his heart he feared. He forced calmness to his lips, but the thought of his officer speaking, gripped his soul to numbness. The sick one might recover and spoil all.

"Did I not tell you, my friend, this mighty churchman was little to be afraid of?" he said bravely. "If we are forced to fly, we have but to cross the lake and throw ourselves on the mercy of the British, who I know to be bad enemies to their foes, but good friends to the helpless and oppressed as we shall be."

"We may not be forced to leave," McLeod said doubtfully. He had small liking for a journey through the midst of the swarming Iroquois on the other side of the lake, with a loved daughter to protect. "We may not have to go," he repeated in a more hopeful manner, and his companion smiled.

"We may not, but I am one leaving little to chance. Now, friend storekeeper, 'tis time you went to bed. Good night."

McLeod almost smiled. "Aye, I trust 'twill be a good night where you intend going," he said wistfully.

"Why of course it will. Bed is a safe place."

"But by the clothes you wear you do not purpose such safety. I overheard your orders to Peche. If you were absent from parade to-morrow, he was to acquaint the Abbe of your night journey. I was not sure you intended summoning the Missassagas this evening, but your attire assures me of your purpose. I have never before seen you out of uniform. You wear a woodsman's dress which is contrary to regulations. Are you satisfied?" And the old man scowled.

"True," he muttered, hesitating, his scarred face going red. Never, since he had taken the oath to serve His Most Gracious Majesty, King Louis XIV, had he ever appeared abroad in other garments than a soldier's clothes. And that was many a year gone by. More years, in fact, than he cared reminder of. "True, I do break the Articles of War in so doing, but — name of a fish, I must go, yet I cannot go jangling a cartload of iron with me, announcing to the red devils my whereabouts. I must see for myself what temper they be in ere I summon them to the Fort."

"'Tis no great offense," McLeod said hastily. He was quick to note the sore subject of apparel that hinted at desertion in the other's mind. And he hurried to quote examples of many brave officers who from necessity and from love of country had attired themselves in mufti. "There was Lieutenant Beausejour," he began.

"Hanged by the British for a spy," came the grim interruption.

"Well, Captain Sorel, then."

"Stuck full of pine splinters and roasted to a cinder. They only knew what came of a brave soldier by the metal tab he carried."

"Oh, well, they had to assume such risks," McLeod hurried to say, seeing his examples but made matters the worse. Then he added slyly, "Of course I can go alone, if you —"

"If I am afraid? Why hesitate? Of a truth I like not the idea of a dance on naught."

"The hemp is not grown that will hang us. You said so."

"And I am also afraid of fire," the other continued calmly, though the banter touched him on the raw, "that is, when it

comes too near my skin. But you may jeer an you will, I am determined to acquaint myself of the temper of these dogs ere I let them in here. If I do see fit, of course the chief dog of the lot will lie to their father as they call the Abbe. 'Twill keep him from asking questions of us, that is one comfort. Now if you are ready —" Hastily extinguishing the lantern, he opened the door for his crony to pass out, closing it quietly behind him.

As they moved silently along, he muttered, "We may come back with our hair in the place appointed for its growth, but —" To end his sentence he shrugged. In his own mind doubt of the fact prevailed.

At their approach the sentry unbarred the heavy gate. With a word of caution, that he was not to fire until sure at what he aimed, both stepped out to the gloom. Waited until dropped bars announced the Fort as secure as was possible in a land where nothing was secure save a man's honor. Even that personal belonging sometimes leaving New France more than tarnished, especially when the owner had opportunity to dip into the treasure box at Quebec.

As their figures faded into obscurity, the soldier resumed his pacing. "Sure at what I aimed?" he muttered. "Were I sure the bullet I sent would bite his heart, I would be sure with a vengeance. Curse him, I say, for his treatment of men all better than the best bone of his rotten carcass." With a surly growl he spat viciously, thinking of the many afflictions undergone at the hands of his Sergeant. "I trust he never returns," he added angrily.

The old soldier, unconscious of the dark wish, was keenly alive to approach of any open enemy. As he and his companion stole through the tall aisled forest, coming near to the Missassaga encampment, a ruddy glare startled both. Silently they halted, casting glances about on all sides.

"Fire! At this hour?" whispered McLeod. "Can they be at a council?"

"The devil alone knows what such dogs would do at any time," was the irritable reply. Sergeant Pere was not himself. The six-day strain had told heavily on his ancient body — destroyed something of his once care-free manner. Then the appearance of the Abbe. His stern authority, the sense of his civil power, oppressed the devil-may-care sergeant of foot. Fas-

tened on his mind an overpowering sense of danger. "The devil alone knows," he added slowly, and McLeod shook his head in assent.

"You may rest assured, he holds high place," he whispered. "But why they should summon even his help at this hour passes my wits."

"Let us crawl close. You understand their cackle."

With one accord they dropped on all fours, crawling to within twenty feet of a huge fire leaping skyward with crackling roar. Round the blaze sat some twenty old men; behind them stood many young braves, all painted with colors, the various signs of the tribe of the Crane. One tall, bent Indian was earnestly speaking. As earnest a hearing given his sober words, evidenced by the grave faces of the silent hearers.

"Who is this preacher?" Sergeant Pere whispered to the storekeeper, lying full length at his side.

"One I thought long dead. The uncle of Wabacommegat," came the astonished cautious answer. "He was a brave and a good man." Then he touched his companion for silence, as above the sputtering of the logs, a clear chill voice pitched in the accents of the aged reached their ears.

"Children of the Tribe of the Crane," the old one commenced, "I, whose voice has long been lost to your councils, say again your Chief has departed from wise paths and straight courses. He leads his young men astray. The white man's belt of peace he casts aside at the whisper of lust. What do you do, men of the Missassagas? Do you readily offer bare necks to the ropes of the French, your good allies? Offer your wives and children as a sacrifice for treachery? Long life, my brothers, is not gained by crooked ways. The forest spoke to me as I journeyed, and I stole from the side of my master the good father, to warn you of his anger — to warn you of the folly that causes weak children to match weaker wills against the just anger of a parent."

A violent fit of coughing caused him to cease, and Sergeant Pere whispered, "I see the crowd hide their scarecrow faces. What says he to them?" But McLeod shook his head, and the other closed his eyes as if seeking sleep. Then the old Indian, taking one step forward, pointed an accusing finger at Wabacommegat, sitting with his face covered in a fold of tat-

tered blanket.

" Do you think to lead your young men against sworn allies? Think to match knives with the muskets of your masters? Does the hare hunt the wild cat? Dare you place young men against warriors, who bend enemies to their strength as bows the forest to the breath of Manitou? Wabacommegat, my sister's son, pause in this madness. Forget the evil in your mind. Think on what our father, who waits at yonder Fort to have speech with you — he who bears a message from over the bitter waters — will do to the young men you sought to lead to murder against his people. I warn you to think well. Warn you to seek this great man, plead with him for mercy."

Again a violent spasm seized him, preventing speech. This time it was McLeod who eagerly touched his companion. " I remember what became of him now," he whispered. " He was baptized into the Church by the Abbe. Followed him to Quebec, resigning the Missassagas to Wabacommegat."

" Name of a fish, but he is different to his drunken nephew then. But what does he say to the unhung wretches that causes them to start? When he finishes wake me," the Sergeant muttered drowsily, but his crony warned him to silence, whispering he would repeat word for word the speech of the old man who commenced again in a tired and feeble voice.

" Children of the Tribe of the Crane," he said slowly, " I who was once your Chief counsel that you heed not the words of Wabacommegat, but urge you to at once make peace with the good father. Well for you it is I learned of your assault on yonder outpost — stole hither to warn you, ere it be too late." He hesitated to scan the scowling faces, and McLeod whispered again in the ear of his companion.

" He must have journeyed with the Abbe," he said. " Now I understand."

" 'Tis more than I do then," came the angry answer. " Tell me when he is through, then will I give the dogs my message, and —"

" You will do what? " gasped the other.

" Give them my message, I said. Think you I came out to hearken to a sermon? " Sergeant Pere was now thoroughly wide awake but somewhat testy in manner. " See," he added cautiously, " they move away. 'Tis time they went, or doubtless the old one would have preached till morning, and they

would have had little stomach for the dose they will receive from blackrobe."

The circle about the flames melted. Some of the older men followed Wabacommegat to his tepee. The younger braves, scattered in twos and threes, remained behind, sulkily muttering, as their former chief moved among them, speaking earnestly, but with little apparent softening of the hardened men he implored to reason.

McLeod took advantage to acquaint his comrade of the words spoken. Briefly touched on the given good advice. At the same time tried to persuade his willful companion to return to the Fort. Then return with some show of force, and summon Wabacommegat to the Abbe. But Sergeant Pere impatiently shook off a detaining hand. Stood stiffly upright. Stepped boldly, with stern face and slow footsteps, out to the glare of the red embers.

Immediately he was surrounded by a number of young men, who without a word seized his unresisting form, hurrying him to the tepee of their Chief. But if his muscular arms were idle, his scathing tongue was immediately put to use.

"'Twill be well for you that you hide from my sight when next you visit Fort Toronto," he said fiercely. "For every hand that soils my clothing, I will inflict ten good blows with my boots on the first coming within reach. I warn you."

"Silence, brother," a voice whispered in his ear, and he turned to observe the old Indian following close.

"Ho! 'Tis you, ancient one," he said calmly; "I pray you call off these dogs. I am unused to such handling, and the touch of these women fighters annoys me."

"Peace, my brother," whispered the other, then commenced to cough with such violence, that even hard-hearted Sergeant Pere was sorry for his trouble.

"Peace!" he muttered. "Peace, 'tis a scarce article in this region. And yet I think you far gone along the road to a land, where if the priests tell truth, there may be some to spare." At this moment Wabacommegat came out from his tepee. McLeod, who was unmolested, came forward, and the mob of Indians gathered close in a circle. "Their bellies teach them caution," the old soldier whispered with a grin. "They have sense enough not to touch the man who provides good strong-water."

Wabacommegat moved to the glare of the fire that lighted up savage features he endeavored to soften to a meek humility. With one hand he waved away the clutching fingers of his young men. Stood staring, silent, ere he spoke or moved a muscle.

"What does my white brother do at my council?" he said harshly.

"What do you do, who dare lay hands on the sacred person of an officer of His Most Gracious Majesty, the King of France?" Sergeant Pere burst out angrily, subsiding at the earnest touch of McLeod's fingers.

"The young men who so dared shall be cast from the lodges of my tribe," was the quick reply, and the young braves shrank back out of sight.

Sergeant Pere pursed his lips in a silent whistle, but not a sound issued from them. Helplessly he looked at McLeod, who with a shrug, waited for Wabacommegat to continue.

"What do my brothers do at this hour?" he said at last. "What have they to say that may not wait, until the sun shall light their footsteps through the forest?"

Suddenly the storekeeper stepped boldly forward. "Wabacommegat," he said in a loud voice that all could hear, "we bear a message from the great father, who comes to visit you. To-morrow he commands you and your young men to Fort Toronto. See that you fail not to appear. Such is his urgent command." He waited to observe the effect of his imperative speech. To his great surprise the Chief appeared to smile. Then he came close to both his former antagonists. Laid a grimy hand on either of their shoulders.

"Why does my brother speak in such harsh manner to his allies?" he asked slowly. "What has the Chief of the Missassagas done that angry words fall from the lips of his friends? What reason is there for this wild talk?" Sergeant Pere thrust off the clutching fingers. McLeod, more diplomatic, more versed in the duplicity of the red men, shook his head to remain silent. "Are my brothers dumb?" he sneered, and the old soldier unable to longer restrain an aching tongue, gave free vent to his feelings.

"Why do we come?" he almost shouted. "Why, but to demand an account of the assault on Fort Toronto, and the massacre of many of its garrison? Why, but to demand from

you — you and your mob of murderers,— the penalty for daring to lay hands on the least of my soldiers? Why — name of a fish, but the catalogue is too long. Come to-morrow and answer to your father in person, for the crimes enacted against the King of all New France."

"My brother has the sting of the moccasin in his tongue," Wabacommegat replied softly. "He is mistaken. I, and my young men, have taken their lives in their hands venturing against the Iroquois, to preserve the soldiers of the Great King over the bitter waters."

Sergeant Pere gasped. The audacity of the man was beyond belief. Who would have dreamed of such colossal lie to escape punishment? And he stared with dropped jaw and vacant eyes at the wily son of the forest, who had just framed the most stupendous lie to which a hearing had been given.

"Does my brother doubt the word of a chief?" Wabacommegat asked haughtily. "Does he not know, that even now the young men of the Missassagas have returned with the soldiers who were captured by the Iroquois?" Again the old soldier shook his head. Bewildered, he passed a hand over his forehead as if doubting he heard aright. He glanced at McLeod, who made no sign as he leaned motionless against a tree-trunk. "If my brothers doubt," the Chief continued with a sneer, "they have but to wait, and the soldiers will appear." And Sergeant Pere quickly recovered his wits. As yet he could not understand, his one thought to return to the Fort, to talk over the matter with McLeod.

"My brother fears to wait?" Wabacommegat said, and the venom in his voice stung the other to speech.

"Fear! Who shall I fear among your pig-dog murderers?" he raged. "I fear no savage no matter how great a liar he may be. You and I, Chief of the Missassagas, will wait to settle an old account — one that grows in the waiting. When we are through, I think — nay I am sure — the balance will be in my favor. We — Name of a fish, we will leave talk till later. I —"

McLeod came close, whispering. "Come, come," he muttered sharply, "why waste words with this man? He may command a hundred witnesses to the truth of his story." Then with a contemptuous laugh,—"Gather together the men he says he rescued from the Iroquois. Let us return.

We cannot well be worse off, whatever happen."

"True — true. Why do I, an officer of foot, bandy words with a dissolute dog whose mother was a she-wolf, and her stinking breath as poisonous as the lies her son has ready to his mouth. Command these men to appear, McLeod. I may not speak without burning my tongue in a hot mess my lips have neither time nor patience to cool."

He savagely turned away to the red embers. In a few moments seven soldiers appeared, accompanied by Wabacommegat and the storekeeper. He glared, as he saw that though several of the men appeared to have been roughly handled, all were able to walk: not one was seriously injured.

"Will my brother now believe his ally?" Wabacommegat asked. "Dare he doubt the Iroquois attacked the home of the white men? That the Chief of the Missassagas was able to do what his white brothers feared?"

"Fall in!" Sergeant Pere shouted, maddened beyond all bearing at the comment on his bravery. "Fall in!" he repeated, and as the limping soldiers slowly obeyed, he said bitterly, "Chief, you have had your turn. Mine is yet to come. My time may never come, but — we will see who lies best at last. Now, fail not to appear before your Father. He — not I — commands attendance."

Without another word he marched off his men, supremely indifferent to the fierce scowls and savage glances from the younger braves. His little company, weary, tired beyond expression, entered the dappled shadows of the vast forest, whose wooded aisles were lighting with shades of pearl-gray tints coming from a rising September sun. And as they disappeared, the ancient Chief of the Missassagas came gently to the side of his long dead sister's son.

"Wabacommegat," he said slowly, impressively, "I have saved the children of the Tribe of the Crane from punishment, you — from death. Are you grown already to a second childhood, that you seek to oppose white men? You, in these silent solitudes, think to be brave — I know 'tis folly. You have hearkened to my counsel this night — have done as I bade you. See that you be as obedient on the morrow. Remember, I am silent — shall be as one dumb, whatever excuse you may offer to our Great Father, when he demands explanation of why your young men attacked the Fort. The Iroquois may be the

offenders — the Missassagas have overcome them by a bravery they did not possess when I knew their tepees. One thing is sure — be certain of your tale. Have proof! Should the truth come to the ear of our White Father — you will die."

Wabacommegat shivered at the words. Manitou was against his doings. His only son, Senascot, foremost in the assault, had disappeared, leaving the father to face the consequences of his folly!

CHAPTER XVII

SERGEANT PERE TELLS SECRETS

THE curtains of night rolled from the earth; the sun mounted his fire chariot, whose diamond wheels of flame should pour upon the world men, the flood light of their flashing. The morning gun thundered a salute to the golden orb in the blue ether, as he dawned on those he had warmed and comforted, since when, no mortal ever had wisdom to discover.

Sergeant Pere and the storekeeper, leading the rescued seven, limped into the stockade, all yawning, each tired and dismally weary. "Name of a fish," the old one said, "the sunrise so soon. We are early abroad to greet him." Then to the soldiers, as they halted before his quarters, "One of you attend me. You," pointing to the man who had suffered under Captain de Celeron, for permitting an unknown to approach, "You, scarecrow. The others dismiss. See you lose little time in seeking rest. The most reverend his lord the Abbe will have need of every one of you when his children visit him later this day." And the tired, dilapidated company instantly melted into their quarters. "I am pleased we receive no welcome," he added sourly to McLeod. "If our friend knew of this he might prove a second Dieskau." And his companion nodded assent.

"Have you such a thing as a drink?" he said. "My throat is sore."

"Mine, as dry as that old one's cackle," came the reply. "Come in, my friend. 'Twere a poor sergeant's room that could not find a wet welcome."

Into his lodging he moved quickly, in search of the needed refreshment. The youthful soldier awaited them, seated on the floor; his eyes a volume of appeal as he watched the two drink.

Sergeant Pere eyed him sternly. In all his hasty life of battle and sudden death he never had beheld so dirty a mortal. The man's uniform — or rather, what remained of it — bedaubed with sticky brown clay, ornamented with long pieces

of grass, caused a frown to gather on his features.

"Name of a fish," he said, "but what prison are you from? Here, drink this." And he handed over a brimming draft that speedily disappeared. "'Twill wash the dust from your mouth. 'Twould take a gallon to wash the filth from your body. Now, let us have the tale, and see there be no imaginary additions to its horrors." Filling his pipe he threw himself on the bed, where McLeod had already taken refuge, to listen attentively but with openly expressed contempt of the man he called on.

He, from force of habit, raised his hand to the salute. In a mumbling manner commenced. "My Sergeant," he said, "that night when the savages stormed the Fort, I was surprised —"

"So were we all. I have exceeding good cause to know it. Pass that. What I desire from you, is to know your hiding place? Where did they put seven brave men?"

"In the 'pit,' my Sergeant," came the startling answer, and the old man leaped bodily from the bed.

"In the 'pit'?" he repeated vacantly, to McLeod who shook his head. "In the 'pit'? What in the name of ten thousand fishes were you doing in such place and we not know of it? Were all of you there?" he asked suspiciously, and the man nodded.

"Yes, m'sieu, and a weary time we had of it. One night we were ordered out — I know not what night, I lost count in the darkness — blindfolded, and marched away. Where, I do not know, save that we seemed to travel a hundred miles or more. At last we came out by the lake. We heard the water and plunged in being near dead of thirst."

"And you do not know who 'twas captured you?" McLeod asked quickly.

"We were blindfolded with stinking cloths, m'sieu storekeeper."

Sergeant Pere interrupted hastily. "But surely, you made some effort to discover who held you? Of a certainty you made some effort?" he added with a scowl, and the man shook his head.

"We had but one idea," he replied shamefacedly, "that, to save our lives. No resistance could we make. They were there in thousands."

"According to the roster there are but one hundred and

three Missassagas, I believe, McLeod?" Sergeant Pere interjected with a sour smile, and the other nodded assent.

"'Twas the Iroquois," the soldier said quickly. "The Iroquois who captured us. I know something of their language. They spoke freely of the end in store for us, did we not remain quiet."

Sergeant Pere came near. "Iroquois, imbecile?" he snarled. "You dreamed. If that brand of devil had snared your filthy carcass, your soul would long ere this have answered for its grime to an angry Creator. Begone!" he shouted angrily. "If that is all you may tell us, begone! Retire, I say, and fail not to be better prepared for inspection when parade is sounded." And as the man shambled off, he turned, staring at McLeod, who stared back his wonderment at such a startling story.

"Did you ever hear the like, Sergeant?" the storekeeper gasped.

"Never, never. Now what are we to do?" As the other remained silent, "Say something. Do something, anything but look at me as though I were a second Abbe."

"You do fear this man then," McLeod said slowly. "You do fear him."

"Name of a fish, I fear his power, if that is what you mean. I fear my retirement to Niagara in irons, and the jeers of men I commanded. He may do that for me, an he hear how I cared for the safety of the soldiers of New France — may even do more, if I take not precious good care that these seven be kept out of his way."

"Why?" exclaimed the other quickly. "Why has he aught against you?" And the Sergeant smiled grimly.

"I have enemies," he said shortly. "Enemies, who know my history. They may whisper to him that I am of Parisian extraction, though you may not guess that much from my manner."

McLeod started nervously at the words. Whispered anxiously, "For the love of God, Sergeant, do not mention that place in his hearing." And he stared over his shoulder in a panic. But his companion only smiled, patting his arm affectionately.

"I am safe with you," he said. "I know your secret, and you know mine. I cannot read, 'tis true, but I spell print well

enough to make out its meaning, that is, when time is given me."

McLeod, his face the color of the dead, stood still. For a moment his lips refused speech; his hands trembled as though afflicted with sudden palsy. "What — what do you mean?" he stammered at last. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, Rene de Laudonniere, my secret, if it be a secret — is safe with you. That precious family history you read — when none are about — in it I spelled your name. Saw your handwriting, entering the birth of your daughter some nineteen years passed by. As I told you, I am of Parisian extraction, and remember — you!" The other staggered back to the wall, his agitation so great the perspiration trickled down both cheeks.

"You will not inform the Abbe?" he whispered with dry mouth.

"And leave my little maid without a parent? An orphan? What manner of man think you I am? At least, allow me some sense of honor, officer of New France, though I be."

"You lived in Paris, Sergeant?" McLeod began anxiously.

"Aye, and saw you splurging it with the best, while I struggled among the worst."

"How came you to know — of my birth — and when?"

"The descendant of Rene de Laudonniere is like his ancestor as two peas in a pod. One of yours, I notice, is painted in that book you carry — the one who ventured south with Ribault. Oh, none can hear," as his companion glanced apprehensively around. "I am not speaking over-loud. You see I can read print, though I may not trace out mud letters, as the stranger would have me do."

"But how long have you known?" insisted McLeod.

"Since that day in August, some two months gone, when the Iroquois set the storehouse ablaze with a fire-arrow. Sunday it was, you remember? You rushed out with Madeline in your arms. I entered to put out fire, saw the book lying on the table — open at a portrait. I looked, hid it quickly. Then when you were in my quarters — I was on guard over the goods, we had five men sick with a fever — I had leisure to examine more closely those pages. Saw too much for an enemy to know, so I, being friendly toward you, kept my mouth shut, handed you back your treasure wrapped in a bundle of skins —

I saw you jump when I did so, but made no remark — and there you are. Would you have me do aught else? Inform De Celeron, for instance?"

"No. No, old friend. That were indeed to place me in his power."

"Then forget I know of the matter; forget I alone know you to be Count —"

"Hush! Hush, for the love of Madeline," the storekeeper stammered and Sergeant Pere smiled whimsically.

"She would keep my mouth shut. Count's daughters do not play with ancient sergeants of foot," he said. "Have no fear of me. I will not risk the loss of her company, I assure you."

"You do not wonder at my fear of —" Here the storekeeper pointed nervously across the stockade, and his companion nodded.

"No," he said shortly, "I do not; and I would advise you to hide that printed history of yours."

"Be sure I will. He was in Paris, when — when I was there. I have always feared his visits — always feared his remembrance of me. That is one reason — though I tremble often for my girl's safety in these wilds, I requested charge of this outpost. 'Tis off the beaten track, and few of those I once knew like to come. I trust I do right, but —"

For many moments the two remained silent. McLeod trembling, even now that he was assured of silence on the part of his crony, whose wrinkled features showed open doubt of such wisdom. "She is a good maid," he said. "One of the best. Perhaps she is as well off here as in that Paris we both knew." Then he said suddenly, as if to himself, "I would I knew the outcome of our own business," and McLeod, mastering his fears, spoke earnestly.

"Will De Celeron be allowed to remain here?" he said quickly.

"If he remain dumb the Abbe will of a certainty remove him to Niagara. Blackrobe is as fearful as ever our Captain was of the British. If he recover — well, who can tell?"

For some minutes McLeod stared silent through the window toward the storehouse. "Were it not for her," he said slowly, "I would join Birnon."

"A course I would be first to advise, only 'tis a desperate

venture at the best. Crossing the lake hazardous enough. The Iroquois would instantly be out on us when we did come safe across — McLeod, I say we cannot go unless our backs be against the wall."

"Captain de Celeron may recover —"

"But if I can come at him first, supposing he does — that is, ere our friend the Abbe sees him — then I may give my young cockerel many reasons that if he crow too loud, his comb may be cropped. He was to blame. He alone for the whole trouble. He, as well as us two, has something to keep secret."

"In any case I must be removed," McLeod muttered irrelevantly. "I will implore the Intendant for a change of duty. I have served many long years here, and need change. I must be removed," he repeated loudly, and Sergeant Pere frowned.

"That were a good thought," he said sadly. "But, 'twill be lonely without a saucy tongue to fool an old man into belief that he is young again. Of course she knows naught?" he added.

"No. Not one word. Does not even suspect me other than a plain storekeeper."

"She is best so. Country air is sweeter than city. There is a taint in the latter makes women mad."

"You are bitter against the sex, Sergeant?"

"Since my wife listened to the devil, I have never spoken civil word to any save your daughter, McLeod." And the other shrugged. His forehead clouding with regret.

"'Twas a woman drove me hither," he muttered, almost savagely. Then added very gently, "Though had I not come, Madeline had not been here to cheer my misery."

"'Tis near time we cheered our inner man," Sergeant Pere said to change the subject that had taken a personal turn, and he was one to avoid exchange of confidences lightly. In all his hours of leisure at Fort Toronto, he had never said one word of who he was or who his forbears, save long-winded accounts of a sojourn at Brest, under his hero Dieskau. Not even to the storekeeper had he said a word until this fateful moment. Would not have done, so even then, only necessity required some explanation. "'Tis time we hurried cookie," he said after some thought, and a glance at the worn features of his companion. "The fat one will be abroad seeking to fill his

maw. I, myself, could do justice to a round of corn bread and a slice of venison. What say you?"

"We must prepare of course, but what there will be save dried deer's flesh and white bread, is not much."

"Come on then. 'Tis a fine morning. Let us lock the vault of our troubles and forget them. We are yet alive — oh, well, what more can we expect?"

"Forget!" muttered McLeod with a deep sigh. "I have sought forgetfulness these many years, but always discovered remembrance lurking round the corner of to-morrow."

"Two old ones will soon have forgetfulness forced on them, my friend. We grow old. Let us try to forget in assisting youth. The boy and girl be of one mind? Yes, of a certainty they are." And the old soldier loudly chuckled as he stepped forth from his quarters. "Come on, storekeeper; we have them to keep us cheerful."

McLeod followed slowly. He was of more serious disposition than his friend. Could not so easily shake off depression. The thought of his daughter, her loneliness should he be forced to take refuge in the extreme wilds to escape the Abbe, the danger and peril arising from such journey, filled his mind with apprehension. Came to cheer his gloom thought of that ark down the lake, and like another Noah he strove to stifle doubt in the hope of setting a free sail.

Sergeant Pere stood on the stoop as he entered the storehouse. "Name of a fish," he said, pointing to a trestled board spread at the entry, "see what the maid hath done. Here have we two old graybeards gossiped hours away and she has taught us a lesson in industry."

His eyes rested on a table covered with fine linen. In the center, dew yet sparkling on their petals, a glorious bunch of wood flowers perfumed the room. Wild berries piled on a wooden tray; the halves of a melon, with a mound of maple sugar glistening in the sunshine that sought to melt its sweetness, added a coloring to the spotless napery, neatly set with two silver mugs, and knives and forks of a more common metal. And the storekeeper, though accustomed to the habits of a most diligent daughter, smiled his pleasure at the sight.

"She is a dear maid," he said. "She must have been on foot half the night."

"Half of it? The whole of it you mean — and see what

the cunning one has placed for his reverence. Ah, I would I were of the Church."

"'Twill be lost on him," McLeod said with a frown, as he caught sight of a cut glass, the only one in Fort Toronto, set out to honor a man of renown. Feminine lips had touched that delicately carved surface. A sigh rose to his lips. A wife long dead was owner. "'Tis best so," he muttered, thinking of her alone under the sod, in the care of the kindly Sulpicians at Mount Royal. And his companion, catching the words misunderstood their reference.

"Best," he said quickly. "Best, why the maid could not have done better. She has discovered a lost art. She finds the way to a man's heart lies through his stomach, and few women I have known ever knew that much."

"All women know that truth by instinct, my son. Trouble is, few care to practice their knowledge."

The old soldier jumped at the sound near his ear. "Good day to your excellency," he said, saluting hastily. "I trust your lordship rested well?" And the Abbe bowed gravely.

"Excellent well," he said. "I have not slept so soundly since I set out from La Presentation." Then his voice suddenly changed from the courteous traveler to the austere dignitary. "I trust these attentions have not interfered with the gathering together of my Missassagas?"

"They have been summoned, your reverence, and will obey," McLeod replied slowly.

"That is well. Now if you will sound the call to breakfast — I fear my good companion, Brother Alonzo, will have to be personally summoned — You are prepared? Very good. After we have done justice to this far too bounteous repast — after, we will address the poor heathen who I fear will be sadly disappointed."

Sergeant Pere hurriedly sought the cookhouse in search of his little cabbage that he might assist her efforts. Within the heated walls, flushed and rosy, she stood busily engaged in drawing from the glowing oven rolls of fine white bread.

"Ha, little one," he said pleasantly, "'tis well to be dignitary of Holy Church, when you sacrifice beauty sleep for him. Would I were one." The last with a wide grin.

"Think you there will be sufficient?" she asked anxiously. "I have a turkey, Peche snared last night, and the remainder

of a pasty."

"Enough? my chief of all the cooks in New France. Enough? Do you think to supply a regiment of foot?"

"No — but, the fat gentleman possesses a goodly appetite, and —"

"I may not help such affliction, my child," a plaintive voice interrupted, causing a scream to escape her lips. And Ambrose, his eyes fixed on the delicacies displayed, continued slowly, "I have suffered severely for that trouble of mine, I do assure you, maiden. My weight is a cruel punishment to one of my activity."

"There is plenty here for all, good sir," Sergeant Pere hastened to answer. "I trust you stay long to enjoy rest and refreshment," he added craftily, with intent to discover if the scribe knew of his master's purpose.

"I think we remain some time," Ambrose said hastily, then turned eagerly to Madeline. "I pray you not to send in all that delicious bread and juicy turkey at one serving, maiden. My master sits long at table, though he is a poor eater. I like not my victuals cold."

"Do not be alarmed, Monsieur Secretary," she replied with a gentle smile. "I will carve here and save for you a portion of the breast with some hot corn bread."

"Excellent! Excellent! Elijah was not better cared for in the wilderness," he replied piously, but was quickly taken to task.

"I am no raven, sir, at least, I trust I am not black as such a bird? As for a wilderness, I think Fort Toronto well provided with good company at the moment."

"I am rebuked, well rebuked," Ambrose said with a good-natured look in his small eyes. "I should have said, a very daughter of Solomon for wisdom of thought, and a very Delilah for the beguiling of hungry men."

"Your second attempt is very much worse than the first, kind sir," came the gay reply, and Sergeant Pere hugely enjoying the tilt of words, grinned widely, though the secretary stood, not knowing exactly whether he was pleased or otherwise. "I am poor as a healthy maid may be, and I am not a Delilah — at least I have not a Sampson to shear."

"There was a stranger," the old soldier whispered mischievously, and two velvet cheeks colored rose red. "He was

not so strong a giant, but then he surrendered even more easily."

"Oh, Sergeant, please," Madeline exclaimed, turning to hide her blushes. "Please — please carry these dishes to table. Do," she pleaded, noting the desire of her slave to further tease, and he from compassion willingly obeyed.

Ambrose stood wrapped in contemplation of the many tasty dishes carried forth. Suddenly he aroused himself to voice an inward desire for meat. "Ah, doubtless my master is hungered," he said quickly. "I will precede you, my good soldier." As he waddled slowly off, "'Tis not seemly that a man of learning be discovered waiting for crumbs like a second Lazarus at Dives' gateway."

"Name of a fish, my little one, but he is a monster," Sergeant Pere said with a chuckle as he disappeared. "But if he be satisfied with your cookery, he may prove a find, eh?" And with a smile the girl nodded, as she moved with her ancient friend to the storehouse.

The Abbe with his medical associate was already seated at table as they entered. The secretary was preparing to read, but his roving eye paid more attention to the feast than to the rounded periods of the learned writer whose wisdom his lips should have decorously recited.

"I fear your memory is somewhat short, Ambrose," the Doctor said at last, after a prolonged stammer of the stumbling reader. "Haste is unnecessary where you are concerned." Then he turned to the storekeeper seated on his left, "Bread and water is prescribed for him," he said shortly, and Ambrose came near groaning in abject misery.

Slowly his covetous glance returned to the pages of his book. In a monotonous drawl he endeavored to satisfy his dreaded master, who remarked with approbation, "That is much the better, Ambrose. More in accordance with the intent of the writer." Then he said suddenly and the storekeeper jumped, "Now, Monsieur McLeod, we will attend to your bloodthirsty Missassagas." And his thin lips curved in the wraith of a smile as his keen eyes noted the dismay of the man he addressed.

"As your reverence is pleased to command," he muttered, rising to move unsteadily from the room, encountering Sergeant Pere in full regimentals waiting on the wide stoop.

"He wants them," he muttered and the other grinned.

"They are here in full force, my friend," he replied, pointing toward the enclosure. "See what brave show my few make against their gaudy numbers."

With the exception of two sentries, lookouts on the wall, every available man was at an appointed post, close to the foot of the steps. Facing their slim array, the whole tribe of the Crane. A silent mob of savages who had crept down upon Fort Toronto with as little noise as makes the leaf bidding adieu to its parent stem.

"I would we were come safely through the ordeal," McLeod said, and the other scowled.

"Now we shall hear some wild tales of wilder bravery," he said. "Of how five men slew five hundred, bringing off alive seven soldiers of New France."

"We may hear more of how two men sought to deceive one."

"Then the hearing will not tire either," came the testy reply. Savagely the old soldier turned, silently staring out over the heads of that painted and much bedaubed crowd, all gathered to pay homage to the representative of His Most Gracious Majesty, The King of all New France. Wabacommegat, prominently forward, glanced quickly up, and his glare of dislike made a shiver ripple up the spine of the man who stared. "I wonder how near he can come to the truth?" he muttered apprehensively. "From what I know of him he is a bad marksman at that target, but he may have luck, and then?"

Several hours passed ere the Abbe condescended to make an appearance, giving Sergeant Pere much time for thought. The more he thought the more worried he became. Fear for himself he never knew — but his little cabbage, fatherless in these wilds, caused many a curse to rise to his thin lips, and as the sun began to wane his nerves grew irritable with waiting.

The Most Reverend the Abbe Picquet, Prefect Apostolic of all New France, and Doctor of the Sorbonne, was possessed of neither nerves nor irritation. His subtle knowledge of Indian character taught him that the native rarely appreciated favors granted in a hurry. The longer the period of enforced waiting, the more likely were his suppliants for a mission to value what he thought best to grant them. Wabacom-

megat, with the Tribe of the Crane, were to prove the worth of patience well that day. Many long hours they waited. In the cramped enclosure they saw the sun rise to his meridian; were there even when the god of day prepared to dismount from his fire chariot and descend in a blaze of color to a well-earned rest.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW A DOCTOR DEPRIVED A MAN OF HIS SPIRITUAL COMFORTS

SERGEANT PERE turned to McLeod impatiently, with venom in his voice. For the fiftieth time he had stolen on tiptoe to the entrance, seeking to discover the intention of the man he feared. Each occasion found the Abbe engaged in dictating to his secretary; each occasion brought the old man back to the side of his crony, muttering wrathfully of a longed for vengeance. "Name of a fish," he growled, and McLeod shook his head to be cautious, "had Dieskau kept the English outside the walls of Brest so long as this blackrobe keeps us waiting here, they had grown gray with vexation, and died of old age."

"We may do little to hurry his reverence. 'Tis ever his way to make the savage wait. Once he kept a council two months, and then having eaten all their stores they were forced to go hunting deer ere they could hunt their enemies."

"An Peter keeps him waiting half the time he has kept us, he will conclude a warmer spot than Heaven is to be his future home."

"Hush! Hush! Man alive, do you want him to hasten your last journey? He would without a thought, did he hear such gibing." Suddenly the door was thrown wide behind them, and the man they spoke of, preceded by Brother Alonzo and Ambrose, came forth. The two humbly made way for the three to pass. As they moved to the front of the stoop, McLeod muttered, "Now. Now we shall soon know all."

The Abbe stood silent, his glance of steel softened to one of milder temper as he thought of the disappointment he was about to inflict on the wretched remnant of a once powerful nation, cowering beneath his steady eyes. As he stood with pitying mind, Wabacommegat with his people crowded close to the wooden stoop, where waited the visible emblem of a Holy Church invisible, whose teachings they had all heard but failed to interpret aright.

With a wave of the hand to command silence that was his

long ere he commenced to speak, the Apostle of the Iroquois with bowed head invoked a blessing from the Divine Authority he truly believed he represented on earth. Then, suddenly, he commenced his speech. Spoke, in powerful voice, severe in tone, but softened by a sympathy he named as weakness, that reached the ears of the last man crowding to the outskirts of the painted mob.

"Children of New France," he said slowly, "sons and daughters of a Blessed Church triumphant on earth, I, your loving father, bear a message. The words of a greater than I — the will of the Great King who dwells over the bitter waters. His Majesty, the King of France, bids me bear news to you. Your Chief, Wabacommegat, requested a mission for you, his people, at this place. I am here. Await his reasons." Then he calmly seated himself in a chair, dutifully placed by Ambrose, while Brother Alonzo smiled benignantly down upon the silent throng.

Wabacommegat rose hurriedly. In a rough and rude manner, speaking the gutturals of his own harsh language, that he knew from past experience his absolute master well understood, he answered.

"Our Great Father is welcome to this land," he said. "We — I for my people do require a mission. The reason? Our father knows. The Iroquois, his enemies, have many such. We, his friends, have none. We have given our lands freely. They have sought by war to retain their own. The Great Spirit gave equally to both Nations. We are content with the friendship of the white man in exchange for our hunting grounds. Are the Iroquois? No! Yet they have many missions; we — not one. They receive warmth and comfort; we but cold and hunger. They have sweet waters to drink; we, thirst. Yet — again I say are we friends of the white men who take from us our lands. Our foes, the Iroquois, defend themselves with fire and slaughter, receiving good gifts for blows, many missions for slaughter, and we — the children of our Father — have naught.

"What good wishes have we not sent to the Great King over the bitter waters? What desire for instruction that the sons and daughters of the Tribe of the Crane may benefit? You, our Father, know of these things. Know also that a mission we must have, if he would have my people know and

do great things. I have spoken. May my words enter the heart of my Father whose servant I have always been."

Here the Chief sank to the ground, covering his face with a corner of tattered blanket, to wait impatiently for an answer. His parched throat craved strongwater. Though he had gained some liquor at the hands of a soldier in the early morning, paid for by a beaver skin, ruthlessly taken from a patient woman, his appetite was well nigh uncontrollable. At the moment his mind was filled with a vision. Unlimited liquor procured from a mission, intended to instill reform, but which he demanded should distill potions for his private use.

The Abbe sat frowning. He saw but loss to his beloved New France by the establishment of such a school in so ill defended a spot. His dream of a grand New France, but the longer delayed by indulgence to the native. In his heart he had often pondered the question of slave labor to till the ready ground. But he abhorred the bare idea of the Missassagas becoming slaves to drink, thus becoming useless instruments for the purpose he had in mind. He did not see eye to eye with the Chief of the Missassagas, that increased population would ensure a freer flow of strongwater. He was totally opposed to the liquor traffic. Had spoken most energetically at Quebec — boldly even, before the Intendant, against the daily distribution of brandy Wabacommegat was early on hand each and every morning to receive.

And the great man, noting the sottishness of the speaker, his unsteady hand and trembling limbs, determined to refuse his request, until McLeod should speak differently of him; give him better character. He searched his brain to discover reasonable excuse. Suddenly a picture came to memory. A scene enacted in the stockade when a last visit had been made.

"Wabacommegat," he said, "since when has this great zeal for teachers touched your heart? Do you suppose a mission a canteen? Since when have you displayed deep interest in my words, that a mission should be granted? You have been treated as you wished. You asked and received — a canteen — a daily supply of liquor. The curse of fools since the days of Noah is yours. Unlike the Iroquois, you speak of, you have never sought Holy Church. Do you forget that when last I came here to visit you were drunk? So drunken, my words fell on deaf ears. That day your tongue was dumb.

Could not state clearly the desires of your bestial appetite. These matters I have long pondered in my heart. You show little desire to reform. And hear my words, I have said to the Great King over the bitter waters that your request is unreasonable — that to my mind the Missassagas are not yet ready for the establishment of the mission you request. I have spoken. If my answer be harsh and little to your liking the rod is of your own shaping with which punishment reaches your people."

At the conclusion of the words Wabacommegat leaped to his feet, his eyes red with lust of slaughter; his soul on fire with disappointment. With a bound he sprang toward the speaker, but a lean hand closed on his shoulder. He hesitated, staring into a pair of steady eyes that suddenly tamed his instant desire for revenge.

"Why hurry, Indian?" Sergeant Pere said with a broad grin. "Why hurry? Think you his reverence has a store of strongwater up his sleeve that you rush to him in so hasty a manner?" And the Chief paused in his vain attempt.

"Soldier some day dance. Pine fires hot," he stuttered wrathfully. Then he jerked his arm free and would have instantly departed.

"Some further speech I would have with you, Wabacommegat," the Abbe said in a loud voice. "I would have your account of those who burned the precious property of my master, the King of France."

Sergeant Pere discovered a cold spear of ice laying close to his spine, that paralyzed movement. "Name of a fish," he muttered, "now is the fat to boil over and burn one or two I know of."

Wabacommegat halted. With a scowl he came close to the foot of the wide steps. Stared steadily up to the grave face observing with keen eyes his every movement. "My Father is wise," he said sneeringly, "but his ear has lost the ring of truth. Does he lay the blame for such happening on the heads of my young men? Who has said this evil thing of them?" he demanded harshly, as the Abbe frowned.

"The storekeeper, and yonder man, the Sergeant of this garrison."

"Both are liars, my Father. Both," came the vindictive snarl. "Both men lie," he repeated. Sergeant Pere was un-

able to follow the harsh gutturals, but McLeod understood well enough, and his face flushed red.

"Does the Chief of the Missassagas say I, his brother, lies?" he asked, but the Indian disdained reply, contenting himself with an angry glare directed toward the old soldier, while the Abbe stood listening eagerly, determined to come to the solution of the mystery.

"Speak, Chief of the Missassagas. I, your Father, demand it," he said.

"Wabacommegat spoke to these men," he answered harshly. "Said they were mistaken. Told them the Iroquois, their enemies, attacked this place from which they were driven away by the bravery of my people."

The Abbe smiled. He knew the courage possessed by the Tribe of the Crane. Sergeant Pere, gathering a word here and there, was content to let matters stand, but McLeod, thoroughly understanding, trembled in his moccasins. He feared the asking of too many explanations, and shivered as the reverend man began to further question the Chief.

"The Missassagas were not to blame then?" he said gently. "I could not think them guilty; that they would dare offend the Great King who daily provides food." He motioned to the storekeeper. "How came *you* to say so?" he demanded sternly, for he sympathized with the evident disappointment visible on the features of their Chief; thought he had been punished quite enough by the refusal of a mission without having a heavy fine laid on the shoulders of his people as payment for damage done. "How dared you and this soldier lie to me?" he repeated, and McLeod hastened to reply.

"Reverend sir," he said slowly, "if we lied — which I much doubt —'twas unintentional. We had the best of reasons to suspect his tribe guilty."

"But you admit you recognized none of them."

"A girl of his people came to us —"

"Where is she? Bid her hither at once. I will question her."

"She disappeared — I was not with her at her going."

"Disappeared? Why and what for? For what reason should she belie her people? Be conveniently out of reach when I demand her appearance?"

Sergeant Pere saluted. "She went to Niagara, reverence,"

he said stoutly, "for assistance." And the Abbe sat down amazed.

Wabacommegat, with gloomy countenance, stood near, a smoldering hatred gleaming in his eyes. A girl was missing from his tepees, and one man — Senascot, his only son. The former he cared nothing for, but that the bravest of all his young men, the most clever and cunning of them all, should disappear, just when the Fort with its booty of strongwater was near within grasp, was something he could not fathom. What an opportunity had been lost! Now, a mission had been denied. Under his breath he savagely cursed the first-born of his loins, whose treachery had robbed appetite of satisfaction.

"Chief of the Tribe of the Crane, these men say one of your women came to warn them of your purpose. Is this thing true?" With all the stolidity of nature to assist control of his muscles, the old man started as the calm voice of the Abbe fell on his ears. "A girl gave warning!" he thought. Rapidly crossed his mind of the white man in his tepee, of Rose of the Hills, the blow felling her body to the earth. She had done this thing for revenge. Revenge for a hasty stroke had robbed him of pleasure. How he would beat her did she dare return. "I await your answer, Chief. These men say a woman of your people gave warning of an evil design upon this place." Again the Abbe spoke sternly, and the Chief, with features rigid as the wooden post against which he leaned to steady himself, replied between clenched teeth.

"Does my Father believe women find seats at my council?" he said haughtily. "Does he think Wabacommegat would permit a woman to know his doings? My Father cannot believe these men. Not one of my people dare so much." And the Abbe, knowing the secrecy of the native, was more than half persuaded McLeod and the soldier were both mistaken.

"Where is this girl?" he asked, turning suddenly on the two, who slowly shook their heads. "You do not know? Then were you not mistaken? You do not recognize any here concerned in the assault? Was not this girl — a dream, imagination?" He sneered and Sergeant Pere frowned. "You hesitate? You are not sure?"

McLeod, more than willing to put an end to a questioning that at any moment might bring his undoing, hastened to reply:

"We may have been in error, your reverence. The night was dark as a wolf's throat — we captured none of the besiegers — they may have been Iroquois as this man says."

"Ah!" remarked the Abbe, "you are long in confessing error, McLeod. Now hark you, I have something to say. For having aspersed my Missassagas without sufficient proof, I lay this charge on your shoulders. You shall pay to this good friend of ours the value of ten beaver skins." As Wabacommegat gave a start of pleasure, he added quickly, "In trade goods only, not in strongwater." And the wily son of the forest scowled. As for the storekeeper, his inward dismay at such a heavy demand may be conjectured, not written. Sergeant Pere flushed red, but he remained silent; determined part of his scanty pay should go to making up the price of a most one-sided peace.

"You think me harsh?" the Abbe said slowly, for he knew his man. Knew the fine would be forthcoming from McLeod, for he was honest as the day. In all his travels up and down the length of New France he had never discovered such an upright storekeeper as this bearded man, buried deep in the wilds. And he hesitated to inflict such a punishment. "'Tis necessary," he said quickly. "Very necessary this Chief be appeased. He has a sore disappointment from which to recover, and his young men are perilous near your home."

"Indeed, we found out that truth," muttered McLeod.

"'Twas the Iroquois, stubborn one," exclaimed the Abbe. "'Twas those fiends. They are ever ready to slaughter at the instigation of the English. Now, having said my say, I will retire. Farewell, Wabecommegat. Your Great Father may change his mind — that is, if you change your ways."

"Leave well enough alone," Sergeant Pere exclaimed, as his crony was about to remonstrate. "He has gone," as the Abbe disappeared, "let him go. How explain Birnon?"

Madeline overhearing, trembled with alarm.

"Where is he?" she whispered.

"Gone fishing, my dear," the old man chuckled. "He went hurriedly," he added, noting her alarm.

"He never so much as said good-by to me," she pouted.

"How could he? His mouth will not obey his heart," Sergeant Pere grinned as he spoke. "I doubt me he has even spoken your name. Never in your hearing, that is." And

she fled to escape his banter, assumed to cheer her for the loss of a lover. Then he turned to McLeod, a vindictive look in his eyes. "You will pay that drunken dog for his care of us the past six days, McLeod? Not in trade, surely. Blows would be better. Name of a fish, when I think of him, I swear to myself."

"I must. An I do not pay to the uttermost, the Abbe will hear of it."

"I would have fought the matter to a finish but for our stranger and the maid. He is a man after my own heart, though what he does in this uncivilized spot passes my poor wit." Then with a curt word he dismissed the soldiers, and turned to follow into the storehouse, prevented by Ambrose in the doorway.

"The most reverend, my master, desires to be alone for a brief space," he mumbled dolorously, for a hunger tore at his cavernous depths, biting deep into his fat internals.

"Is our officer with him?" McLeod asked quickly.

"No. He is with Brother Alonzo, our doctor, a skilled man of medicine. The poor patient may recover. His attendant is wise beyond belief. I heard of his curing a brother by removal of his scalp."

"Name of a fish, but is he Christian?" Sergeant Pere blurted rudely. "There be plenty of savages too ready to such work in this land, but I have yet to hear of a white man doing so much. By the name of ten million fishes I believe him too kindly a soul for such brute work."

"Swear not at all, my good soldier," snapped the fat one. "An the Abbe hear you, suffering may come to your body." Then he reëntered the storehouse, and the other forebore to retort. He remembered the look on a man's face at breakfast, and smiled sourly, thinking there were others paying the penalty of saying too much.

He turned to his quarters while McLeod climbed the platform to stare out over the smiling lake. Just why he did so he could not have explained. Then his mind wandered to Wabacommegat, and he turned to the interior of the stockade seeking the Chief among the Missassagas crowding the dusty space. "He must have gone," he said. "I wonder where? He and I will have more talk ere that beaver price reach his greedy paw."

Again he turned toward the lake, whose smooth surface glittered steel-like under the rays of the setting sun. Far down the father of all waters moved two tiny specks. What they were, plain to his accustomed eyes. What they contained, invisible, but affording much food for thought and more cause for anxiety. The specks were canoes! In one only was there sign of life, and that one towed the other. They came slowly, exceeding slow toward the Fort, and the man staring anxiously trembled at their unlooked for appearance.

"They cannot reach shore till darkness fall," he muttered. "What further mischief is coming to us now?" Then he started, for a gentle hand was laid on his shoulder and he faced his daughter.

"Is that the canoe of Francis?" she asked with a smile. But her father suddenly pulled down the fingers she pointed.

"I fear so," he whispered. "Come." They paced the long platform until they reached the huge posts of the gateway. "Careful, Madeline. Francis nears a prison with every sweep of his paddle." And the girl started back with horror in her eyes.

"Why?" she gasped. "Why?"

"He has not one scrap of writing to prove who he is," came the gloomy response. "Senascot captured him, swore he was a spy. Wabacommegat detests him — why, I am unable to fathom. Should he appear here — now — the Chief may demand his person of the Abbe, and he to soothe the anger of a disappointed man at the loss of his mission would doubtless grant him vengeance."

The girl covered her face with two shaking hands. For the moment she appeared about to faint. Suddenly, mastering the feminine weakness, she muttered, "How may we prevent his landing? How save his life? He must be warned, for he is mine and I will save him if 'tis possible to a woman."

The storekeeper came as near the land of jealousy as he ever did in the course of a long life. Anger rose hot in his heart against this youngster stealing that which he had spent many a year in rearing. Then his love for the girl, who seemed to a parent too ready to desert the parent nest, strangled resentment, and with a deep sigh he placed an arm over her shoulders.

"I do not know for sure 'tis he," he said softly and very gently. "If 'tis, he cannot reach shore till after dark. Come! Let us to Sergeant Pere. He will do something. I am not the thinker I once was."

They descended from the high boards. Moved slowly to the quarters of the soldiers, talking together as though naught out of the ordinary affected their lives. As they neared the cookhouse, she said with a smile, "I must to the cook and give him assistance." She spoke loud for several stood near, but as her father turned to go she found time to whisper, "As you love me, find a way to save him."

McLeod moved on to his crony, sauntering slowly as with the effort to kill time. Once safe within the quarters of Sergeant Pere he hurried to his side, grasping him with no gentle hand.

"What canoe did Birnon take?" he asked, and the other jumped to his feet, laughing.

"The one with the carved head-board," he answered. "Do you think I would give him aught but the best? Why?" he asked, losing his grin, and McLeod fell to mumbling incoherent phrases, until he lost patience and shook him roughly by the arm.

"Wake up, idiot," he said harshly. "Why in the name of a thousand devil fishes do you come here scaring the breath from my carcass?"

"Because the young man nears the Fort, with another canoe in tow of his own." And at the answer Sergeant Pere staggered back to the wall, as though smitten with a sledge hammer in the grasp of sinewy hands.

"Good Saints defend us," he muttered. "He — to come now, when all was going smooth."

"What shall we do?" McLeod questioned feebly.

"Do? Naught, save wait, and see what God sends us. I trust it be not a rope, that is all. We must wait, and that is hard to do when every sense of safety shouts danger. I pray that scalping brother has bad luck." Then he donned his uniform coat, thrown on one side for relief from its heat. Stood, ready to go, but the storekeeper sat white and still, the hands covering his features shaking as though afflicted with palsy. "Come," the old soldier said at last. "Let us to the storehouse, and see how the maid fares. 'Twill go hard with her

if harm happen him."

Without a word the other rose, silently followed to the long room where dainty dishes smoked fragrance on a white table. But their sweet smelling savor produced only a sense of nausea to his stomach. His brain whirled at the sight of his daughter busily though calmly engaged in serving the meal. How must she feel, he thought, if he, a strong man, could hardly bear the strain of waiting? He seated himself but not a morsel passed his lips.

Sergeant Pere, as in duty bound, waited behind the Abbe, his grim features a study in color. His scar a purplish tint, that blazed against the sallow of thin cheeks. A savage gleam in his eyes, as of a wildcat defending her young. His mind, chaos. For the man who had saved his worthless life was slowly approaching, unconscious of danger, drawing nearer and nearer to disgraceful death at the end of a dangling rope, or — what was much worse — torture at the hands of savages. He, helpless, powerless.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW A DUMB MAN RECOVERED SPEECH

NOTWITHSTANDING the plenitude of good things spread before him, the Abbe soon made an end of a meagre supper. He rose, intimating to his secretary that his services would be immediately required when his scant meal of bread and water had been disposed of. Then he turned to McLeod. "I desire you and the soldier here to follow me at the earliest moment," he said briefly. "I have good news for you. Brother Alonzo informs me your officer is like to recover. I would have you both with me shortly."

"He has spoken?" Sergeant Pere said hurriedly, and the other stared his anger.

"My good man," he said grimly, "I am accustomed to some measure of respect. Never have I grown accustomed to interruption. When I wish speech of your tongue, which, methinks, at times is overbold, then — and then only — use it with reverence when you address me."

"Your pardon, excellency —" the old man began. But was speedily silenced.

"Granted, for this occasion, because you are an old soldier desirous of obtaining news of a beloved officer. That, and that alone, excuses you. Now attend me both of you as soon as it is possible." With a chill smile he walked toward the inner room, and as the door closed behind his haughty figure, Ambrose with Brother Alonzo followed, leaving three frightened people alone.

"Name of a fish, McLeod, but he curdles my blood to vinegar," Sergeant Pere whispered. But his companion could only nod.

Madeline came close, her face pale as death, her lips trembling as she spoke. "I am going to warn him," she said quietly. Then quickly disappeared, determined to do all to save the lover she had known but such short while, yet whose safety was worth more than great possessions.

"Strange how a woman flies to her mate," Sergeant Pere

said slowly, and McLeod nodded.

"And leaves the feathered nest for the great unknown," he replied bitterly.

"Birds and animals all do the same thing, why should a girl change nature?"

The old man calmly answered, as calmly helped himself to a generous slice of pasty and commenced to eat. Not that he was particularly hungry, but as an old campaigner he had learned to take advantage of every opportunity to replenish the commissariat department. Now he ate rapidly, largely, prompted by foreboding of the time when he might not come at eatables so easily.

"Fill up, storekeeper," he said, beginning on a second slice. "Fill up your gloomy internals. If they be deep as your face is long, 'twill need more provender than lies on these boards." Then he seized a flask of wine, near emptying the vessel ere he ceased drinking.

"One would think eating and drinking occupied your whole life," McLeod answered, staring at the closed door behind whose panels waited a stern man accompanied by one dumb, who, should he find voice, would place them both beyond necessity of finding food. "Eat!" he added fiercely, pointing to the inner room, "and he waiting to devour us?"

"He will have one tough morsel an he starts on me," the old man replied, wiping his mouth with the back of one hand. "Come on in. We will beard the lion in his den. Perhaps we may escape as did a king of old, eh?" Then he moved across the floor, to tap lightly on the panel.

The other followed, but his feet dragged. He had a daughter to care for, and her safety weighed leaden on his feet. "What was to be found inside?" he asked himself. If Captain de Celeron spoke? Told how he had been stricken to the ground in the execution of his duty? He might even say that, to save himself. There was only the word of an ancient sergeant of foot, already under the displeasure of a haughty dignitary, to prove to that authority, jealousy and drink, not zeal and duty, were the real cause of the blow. Who would be believed? Who be punished? And McLeod knew well enough who would suffer. Knew also that his beloved daughter would share in his suffering, by the lonely grief that must ensue when an only parent should be cut off.

Then he was suddenly roused from reverie by an abrupt command to enter. With his ancient friend, he entered to discover the Abbe seated, waiting. He never forgot that entrance.

Two stools were placed before a table drawn across the room. He shivered as he moved to one, the other offered to Sergeant Pere, who with the ghost of a grin dropped quietly into his place. And the Abbe lost little time in coming to the point.

"Inform the good brother we await his coming," he said sharply to Ambrose, who immediately hurried from the room, and the breeze flickering the candles, causing the room to darken, seemed a warning to the two of their own coming dark end. "Ah," he continued, as the doctor with his patient appeared and seated themselves, "now I will be patient — very patient, but the truth must be mine. Now, Brother," he added, "what have you to say?"

"The young man is still under the influence of a powerful drug, your reverence," the medical man said with some dignity. "He —"

"Is not yet recovered, you would say?" came the hasty interruption, for it was clear to all that Captain de Celeron was not himself, intimated by the vacant manner in which he stared about the room. "Not yet?" he added, and frowned at his confrére.

"Your reverence," he said slowly, "as I say, my patient is under the influence of a drug, whose power in the treatment of a dumbness the revered Hippocrates, in his learned 'Prognosis' highly recommends to my profession. I —"

"Spare us, good Brother," the Abbe said sharply. "Doubtless the treatment of such a worthy man is of the best, and of a nature to restore speech, but I am not skilled in the art of medicine. I have little desire to know the cure; what I ask from you, is, not a lecture, not empty words, but speech from this officer. I am sadly disappointed," he ended, shaking his head. "Sadly," as the doctor commenced anew.

"He will come to reason, reverend sir, but time is required. Time for the drug administered to —" Again he was silenced.

"Time! good Brother. Time! I have little enough to spare of that valuable commodity. I seem to waste it here in

trying to discover why and how Fort Toronto has received much damage, and the cause of New France imperiled in a quarrel with our sworn allies, the harmless Missassagas."

"Reverend sir, as I repeat, time alone will cure the patient. The drug of itself is but accessory to the cure. Hippocrates himself has cited many such instances of waiting. He—"

"Aye, aye, my learned friend, your authority is correct. That I doubt not for a moment, but the remedy, time, I may not wait for."

"I have done all that my poor skill may," Brother Alonzo said slowly. "Not only does Hippocrates verify the power of this drug in the treatment of dumbness, but Marignolli, describing his travels to our departed Father in God, Benedict the XII, of blessed memory, speaks of a similar drug exerting much influence upon the brain of dumb ones coming under his treatment. Perchance 'tis the same I use, though under different form. I—"

"Yes, yes, good doctor," interrupted the Abbe impatiently, growing tired of a lecture on materia medica producing no result. "Yes, yes, I understand all that, but what are we to do in the particular case under your own care?" And Brother Alonzo could only reiterate his statement that time was needed, to be waved harshly away by his superior.

McLeod, listening eagerly, began to take heart. The continued silence of his officer was at least a temporary respite, and he ventured a deep sigh of relief. Sergeant Pere, erect as a ramrod on end, sat with his eyes fastened on the opposite wall. As he noted the disappointment of the Abbe, he came near chuckling out loud. In fact, the little noise he did make fell on the ears of the stern man drumming with nervous fingers on the rough table-top.

"Ah," he said sharply, with a glance at the old one who coughed hastily to hide his confusion, "perhaps 'twere well that your former deposition be read to you in the presence of witnesses, and sworn to by you both, ere the same be forwarded to the Intendant at Quebec. Read, Ambrose. Soldier, and you Monsieur Storekeeper, listen attentively."

The secretary cleared his throat. Was about to commence, when the sharp crack of a musket shattered the uneasy silence of the room. Sergeant Pere, in the midst of a desperate effort of memory to remember his exact statement, rose to his feet.

Forgetful of respect, he ran out, banging the door to after his exit with a thud shaking the copper candlesticks almost from their places. McLeod was about to follow, but was chained to the spot by a chill command.

"One is enough to carry trouble, good storekeeper," the Abbe said hurriedly, stopped from further speech by Captain de Celeron who rose from his chair, clutching at the table with trembling hands, his face working with some inward emotion, the sudden sound of his trade had dragged to the surface of his brain. "Poor young man," he added in pitying tones, and as Brother Alonzo attended studiously observed his patient. "Surely, good Brother, he is about to speak."

Suddenly the officer opened his mouth, succeeded in uttering some unintelligible sounds. Then with a white froth gathering on whiter lips he collapsed into his chair, his head falling forward on the table with a dull thud. And the Abbe became, from the look on his features, a most disappointed, impatient man.

"Hippocrates speaks of such symptoms," Brother Alonzo said, pausing in the act of compounding a medicine. "One such case was of a boy recovering speech at sound of the oracle at Delphos."

"Sound of Satan is what you intend to say," snapped the irate Abbe. "'Twas the Almighty One restoring speech, though the heathen doctor you, as a Christian, revere over too much thought otherwise, no doubt."

The door thrust violently open, interrupted Brother Alonzo, ready in defense of his high authority. Sergeant Pere entered, followed by Francis Birnon with Senascot, carrying between them the senseless form of Rose of the Hills. Madeline, her features pallid with horror, held one poor torn arm, her face a mirror reflecting the emotions of the company on which they intruded.

The Abbe was first to recover from surprise. "Who have we here?" he exclaimed. "What means this intrusion?" And the storekeeper's daughter hurried to his side.

"Reverend sir," she said, "I beseech you to allow this poor girl to be carried to the room you use. She has been grievously wounded at the hands of the Iroquois. See, her arm is bloody to the elbow."

"At once, my child," he answered quickly. "Think not

of my comfort. Brother Alonzo, I pray you at once give aid to the wants of this poor heathen." Then he stood aside to allow them to carry the still figure past him, and he shuddered as he noted the horrid wounds visible through torn garments.

Rose of the Hills was literally in rags. Her buckskin shirt was cut to ribbons, exposing a bare brown bosom scarred with knife wounds. Her naked shoulders betrayed charred pine splinters stuck deep into their smooth surface, and her lips were torn and bleeding, as though bitten deep to repress outward sign of the torture her poor flesh had been forced to suffer. As the little procession entered the inner room, the Abbe, stern, austere as he was, allowed a groan to escape his quivering lips. "Oh, that such deeds should be perpetrated in so fair a land," he muttered. "Lord, I beseech Thee to have mercy on the souls of those responsible for such horrid work." Then the door opened quietly and three men came out. He turned, pity wiped from his features. Once again he was authority personified.

"Give some account of yourselves," he said harshly. "Who is this white stranger? The Indian I perceive by his head dress to be of the Missassagas."

Senascot stepped proudly forward, one arm placed affectionately over the shoulder of the man he once had hated. The storekeeper also moved toward the table, and Sergeant Pere, not to be outdone in bravery, boldly took his place in line with the three. McLeod was about to speak. Tell the whole truth and take the blame upon his lonely shoulders, when suddenly, without apparent reason, Captain de Celeron rose to his feet, pushing aside the ready arm thrown out by the Abbe to restrain his movements.

"Why has Senascot removed the thongs from this man?" he asked harshly. "Was it not my order he be confined to the 'pit'? Sergeant Pere, why are my commands openly disobeyed?" Then he rubbed his forehead as if striving to remember, stared at the Abbe, grimly silent, to resume his seat as though sudden effort had exhausted his vitality.

"I perceive speech has returned to you, young sir," the Abbe said at last. "You are aware of our authority?" Again Captain de Celeron struggled to stand, clutched at the table, wavered, ere he answered.

"I — I — I am not well," he stammered thickly. "I know

in whose presence I am. That of the Most Reverend, the Abbe Picquet."

"That is well. Now shall we come to the bottom of a most puzzling mystery. That is, if you are able to continue."

"I am somewhat dizzy, reverend sir, but with a glass of wine by your permission,"— Again hesitation rested on the lips of the young officer. His face flushed red, the veins stood out on his white forehead, distended with hatred of the man he thought a spy, and knew for a most detested rival. "Thanks to you, sir," he said, as a cup of wine was poured and handed; slowly swallowed to gain time.

The draft restored his faculties. Across his mind raced a flood of remembrance. The guardhouse, the request of the girl for assistance, his own sitting at the bottle. Then, a struggle with someone — He savaged both lips to restore the face of that one! Suddenly he became aware of a cold glance centered full on his convulsed features, and summoning composure to a reeling brain, he strove to regain mastery of his passion.

"With another draft, reverend sir," he said weakly, "I shall soon be myself. I have lost a space of time I would give much to remember." Draining the second cup to its dregs, he leaned back in his chair to wait, for what he knew not, yet determined to brave whatever came to the last gasp. "I am better, reverend sir."

"Then how came you dumb? That is the first matter to be explained," the Abbe said, shading his eyes from the candle, to better observe the effect of his questioning. For several moments the question remained unanswered, and McLeod turned white as chalk. "I am informed, an attack was perpetrated by the Missassagas on your command," the Abbe continued to supplement a forgetful memory. "This, their Chief denies. Your Sergeant, who has taken charge since your illness, with Monsieur McLeod, declares they alone are to blame. Can you tell me aught of the matter?"

Captain de Celeron sat bolt upright. How long had he been absent from duty? he wondered. What attack had taken place? Had his own folly been brought to light? What had these two said of him? Did they know who was responsible for his present plight? He ground his teeth savagely, at the inability of his memory.

"Give some account of yourselves"

"There must have been some cause for the dumbness afflicting you, young sir." The bitter tones fell sharply on his ear. "You, an officer of New France, dare not deny responsibility for the safety of this outpost, whatever the nature of the calamity unfortunately falling upon you." And the listener woke; hurried to reply. Realized that to save his reputation he must abide the story related by a prosy sergeant of foot he had grown to dislike and a storekeeper he hated with right good will.

"Reverend sir," he said with effort, "my memory is, as you must realize, exceeding weak. Both these men are known to me. I have lived with them many weeks. No doubt whatever, they have related the truth to you. Not the slightest doubt. Could I hear their tale?—" He spoke as though the very effort of speech was almost too much, and the Abbe though still suspicious, commanded Ambrose to read from the Journal.

The drawling of the fat one consumed much time. Captain de Celeron in a tight corner, knowing that if his stern inspector so much as dreamed an officer of New France would deliberately steep his brains to stupefaction; would willfully desert his command for the sake of a bottle — thanked that slow drawl, allowing his brain time to think. He saw as in a glass the penalty for his several offenses. Degradation, dismissal from the service. Such conduct as he knew himself guilty of, bad enough to brother officers. To the Abbe — He drew a long breath. He must walk carefully. Think well ere he spoke. Guide his tongue by the tale he listened to with much amazement. He started as Ambrose read the words,—"Captain de Celeron received his injuries at the hands of a desperate man."

"Is that true?" the Abbe asked suddenly, and all he dare do was nod. The secretary continued to read, and he listened eagerly, wondering what next to expect.

The question of identity puzzled his brain greatly. For his life's sake he could not place the man who dared the blow. Then a thought leaped full grown to a bewildered mind. Who else had reason but this spy standing at his very elbow. He raised his eyes to smile, a smoldering satisfaction in their black depths. At last he had it, and as he paid keen attention to the recitation of the secretary, confidence returned. No mention was made of his drinking bout. Safety was his for the mo-

ment. This interfering meddling priest would soon be gone, and then?

He waited, paying decorous, studied attention to the report of Sergeant Pere. At the conclusion, he turned to the Abbe. With a low bow spoke in courteous manner. "That is the truth, reverend sir," he said gravely. "My Sergeant is a truthful man — one to be thoroughly relied on." And McLeod surprised at the ready acceptance of such a palpable lie to those who really knew the truth, heaved a sigh of relief. Sergeant Pere frowned. He knew his officer. He feared something in store to follow, but what — he could not say. "The Sergeant is a good man, your reverence," Captain de Celeron added with a smile, and the Abbe was quick to answer.

"His tongue is of the longest at times," he said dryly. "Now, young sir, you are certain of the truth of this relation? Of the honesty of these two?" And as a low bow answered his questions, he continued slowly, "Then we will take up the matter of this stranger. What do you here, my good fellow?"

"I had best explain that matter, your reverence, an you will permit me," Captain de Celeron interrupted gently. "He was captured by the Missassagas. Discovered upon the beach, I understand. He was brought here at my command, by the Indian who stands with him."

"How comes it he is wounded? Does he give good account of his movements? Of course he has a license to do trading." And Sergeant Pere at the sharp questions, drew one long hissing breath, while McLeod paled, as he realized how close death stood to his daughter's lover. "Of course you examined his license, Captain de Celeron?" the Abbe repeated.

"Reverend sir, no license was forthcoming, therefore I ordered him to prison until I might communicate with my superiors at Niagara."

"How comes it he goes free?"

"That I must leave to my Sergeant to explain," the young officer said slowly, and the old soldier realized that his inventive faculty, already near strained to breaking point, must be instantly repaired.

"When my Captain was disabled," he commenced, after a pause to wet his lips, "every able-bodied man was pressed into

service. I ordered him to the walls, and he has done well. 'Twas with his assistance I brought off you —" here he pointed toward his immediate superior, who flushed red, "when the devils fired the guardhouse. He saved your life. I say he has done well — no man could do better. That is how he goes free. Matters have been astray the past few hours, but now," and he roughly placed a hand on the young man's arm, "I will see he wanders nowhere that I know not of." As he finished, he turned with savage gesture on his prisoner, though he found time to wink slyly as he pretended violence, completely deceiving both the Abbe and Captain de Celeron.

"Had he papers on his person?" the Abbe asked sharply. He was anything but satisfied. "Of course he was searched?"

"Most thoroughly," Captain de Celeron hastened to say. "Naught was discovered that would lead to discovery of who and what he is."

"The Indian — what part plays he in this — ah,— farce?" And as Senascot stepped forward, the Abbe started back, alarmed at the fierce glare in his eyes.

"Senascot did cause his brother to be made prisoner," he said hastily. "Senascot discovered him in the lodges of his people, and mistaking his purpose brought him to the Fort —"

"For which you shall be generously rewarded, my son," interrupted the Abbe benevolently.

"Senascot requires no reward. Senascot was mistaken in his purpose. His brother saved his life and that of the maiden who was with him at the time."

"And where did such brave deed take place?" the Abbe said with interest.

"Many miles down the lake, my Father. When the maid and I set out for Niagara to gain assistance —" here the young man hesitated for a moment, wondering how to satisfactorily explain his share in the attack. Had this stern man knowledge of the part his people played in that folly? he thought, with keen eye to his own safety. Then he suddenly determined to brazen the matter out. Lie boldly. Say, as explanation of his absence, that he had come on an unknown band assaulting the outpost. That he did not know of what tribe they were. His one idea to gain assistance for his well-beloved allies. "We, the maid and I, set —"

"Were you concerned in the attack upon this Fort?" the

Abbe demanded, rising swiftly to his feet. "Answer me."

"My father is angry with an obedient son," the young brave continued calmly, giving back stare for stare in such cool fashion that his reverence was near satisfied of his innocence. "She who lies yonder could tell much of my doings," he ended, covering his face with one hand, under whose brown curve he eyed the face of his questioner, taking keen notice that his manner was half satisfying an unbeliever. "She could say much," he said slowly, and the Abbe sat down.

"If the maid and you were out on the lake," he said doubtfully, and the Indian, glad to escape so easily from further inquiry, continued:

"The maid and I were well on our long journey," he said. "One day had we paddled, resting at times to ease our labor. Then we fell in with a canoe of the Iroquois. We turned, sought to avoid them by traveling eastward down the Great Water. The maid broke her paddle and we were forced to land — not far distant from this place. That night we were captured by our enemies, and the fear of death came near to us."

For some moments he remained silent. Thoughts of the treatment he and his loved one had received at the hands of his hereditary foes painted his swarthy countenance black with hate. In a voice, ferocious to the ear, he continued, and the Abbe shivered as he listened.

"We were tied to stakes," he hissed. "Old women tormented us. Slashed our bodies with knives. Because the maid would not cry out, they pierced her flesh with pine splinters, setting them ablaze. Some day I too will try my skill at fire, and then —"

"'Tis a command to forgive our enemies," the Abbe said quietly.

"I, Senascot, forgive my friends. My enemies I keep close to my lodging. Their scalps shall hang in my tepee to pay for that they have done to her."

"I perceive teaching is in vain with thee, my son," sighed the reverend man. "Holy Church even may not soften such hearts as thine." And he slowly shook his head, thinking on the many years he had sought to preach peace to so vengeful a nation. "Proceed, my son," he said wearily, "I would hear the whole tale."

"Two days and nights the maid and I have suffered torture. My body you have seen — hers you have yet to see. Then came, this man, my brother. Silently, at night. First he carried the maid to the canoe to return for — me, his enemy. Me, the man who caused his wound, that to this day he may not open his mouth without suffering. What think you of that, my Father? Was Senascot not mistaken when he thought his brother an enemy?" And he leaned close, with blazing eyes that stared unwinking into the face of his auditor.

"The prisoner is indeed a brave man," he said after a short pause. "What do you here?" he asked, turning to Birnon, waiting impassive. As he received no reply, "Can you speak?" and his harsh countenance softened to a smile. None better than he could appreciate bravery. That a white man should deliberately venture his life for two savages, something unheard of. "Where are your papers?" he ended, as Birnon made motions as if to write.

"Now he will scribble again," Sergeant Pere muttered. "He will restore all blackrobe comes near forgetting. His brain is turned with such foolish work. I would his hands were silent as his tongue." He scowled angrily, as the Abbe exclaimed,

"You write? That is well. Your appearance is easily explained. Ambrose. A quill. Haste, lazy one," as the secretary slowly obeyed.

Captain de Celeron sat amazed at the story of Senascot. He started visibly as the prisoner came to the table and commenced to write. Was this fellow to escape him after all? he thought. Would the explanation prevent a noose? His forehead blackened with jealous hate, as he slowly rose and in a most respectful manner addressed his superior.

"Your reverence is doubtless aware this man is of British extraction," he said, and with a frown the paper was snatched away by a man who considered himself most patient.

"British! British!" he exclaimed angrily. "Are you certain, young sir?"

"His clothing at least is of that origin. The pattern speaks for itself."

"Then we will dispense with writing," came the stern reply. "If he be of that nation of robbers he has little right on this side of the lake. No doubt he is a spy. A rope is his best

ending. Away with him. At once."

Captain de Celeron smiled. Fate was on his side. That statement of English birth had cost the fellow his one chance of life. A rope was in the mind of the priest and would soon be about the neck of this insolent interloper. "Is it your command that he be hanged to-night?" he asked slowly.

The Abbe frowned. "As well now as at dawn," he said sternly. "I will not have these pestilent wretches coming here to spy out the fatness of the land." And his voice rose irritable, for the English had ever been a bunch of thorns in his side, and he, though as a rule tolerant and merciful to all, could not resist the temptation to remove one pricking irritation. "As well now as in the morning," he repeated and McLeod drew in a sharp breath between clenched teeth, while Sergeant Pere cursed one man to extremity beneath his breath. "On second thought — second thought is always best — I will spare him a few days. He may tell us something of what we have to fear from our enemies. Yes — let him be kept in durance. I will question him later. If he remain obstinate, I will make of him a warning to all trespassers on the territory of New France."

"I will place him in the 'pit,' reverend sir," Captain de Celeron smiled. "Now — with your permission, I will retire to my quarters. My head swims, I am dizzy at moments. In the morning I shall be better able to attend you." And the Abbe stared.

"Have you forgotten your quarters were destroyed by fire, young sir?" he asked angrily. The destruction of his master's property was hateful to a careful mind. "You seem to have forgotten — or did you know?"

"Destroyed! by whose hand?" gasped the young man without thought.

"That I would give much to know. You surely heard the relation of the Sergeant? Of the storekeeper? Both state the Missassagas to blame. Who was at fault, I would give much to know for certain." Senascot readily filled in the punishment, likely to fall on the offender's head. "You will of course requisition our allies. The guardhouse must be built ere winter sets in, but I will go into details in the morning. I am tired." He yawned as he rose. "Place this fellow in a safe spot, I will examine him at another time."

Captain de Celeron saluted. Turning sharply to Sergeant Pere, he said, "See he goes not abroad to man walls. Remember, I hold your life for his. If he escape, there will be a vacancy in your company, and that speedily." The old soldier touched his glazed cap with deference and prepared to lead off his prisoner.

"Name of a fish," he muttered in Birnon's ear, "but he desires to stand well with him. If you go, I ascend higher than I wish. What to do, lad, I do not know."

They paused, allowing the Abbe to precede them. He smiled, addressing Senascot leaning heavily on the arm of McLeod. "Ah," he said, "enemies may be forgotten; friends, never. I will see that your bravery is well rewarded, young man. Richly rewarded." But even as he spoke, Senascot slipped sideways, to fall full length upon the floor. "What ails him?" he exclaimed, kneeling quickly. Then, "Brother Alonzo, haste!" And the medical man came hurrying to the side of another patient.

"He is stabbed in a dozen places," he said, after a speedy examination. "See, reverend sir, his chest is one raw wound." The peaceful Prefect of New France shuddered at the horrid sight; wondered to himself at the vitality of a man, calmly relating a tale of heroism, while his life blood dripped from a score of ghastly wounds.

"Poor fellow," he muttered. "What shall we do with him?"

The doctor quickly ordered his second patient to be laid at the side of his first. "I may do little for him," he said, passing into the inner room. "One thing, I have a nurse of parts to assist me."

Thus, in a night, Rose of the Hills and the man who would be her husband, lay unconscious and very near death, tended by a young girl who was herself well-nigh dead of terror, at thought of a stranger who was to die in the very near future.

The Abbe returned to his chair, a sense of nausea afflicting his stomach, by reason of the butchery he had witnessed. "That such things should come to pass in so fair a land," he said aloud. "Of a surety, this night may hold no more such horrors for us."

"'Tis rest you require, your reverence," Ambrose said softly. "Will it not please you to retire to the lodging pre-

pared in the quarters of the soldiers?" He was himself both tired and hungry. The openly expressed wish for a master's comfort, the secret desire of his selfish mind.

"Rest! Rest!" came the irritable reply. "How may a man think on sleep when such horrors stalk abroad? Sleep!" he muttered, and fell to thinking.

How far off, his visions of a peaceful New France! he thought sadly. How distant, that population his soul desired, to cultivate the land! A tear started to his eye, that had never known weakness, since the happy childhood spent within the precincts of his own dear Old France.

Captain de Celeron standing waiting, was quick to note his evident distress. He sneered inwardly. The wounds of a savage made small impression on his military mind. He was about to utter some expression of sympathy when a loud report, the sharp crack of a musket, startled both men to attention, roused the Abbe to the stern iron-handed servant of New France.

"In the Name of our Blessed Lord, what is now to happen?" he said, staring at the door, as though awaiting some grisly sight. "What now?" he said, as the door was thrust wide to admit two soldiers, supporting between them a white man whose clothes hung in tatters.

"Fort Frontenac! Fort Frontenac!" he gasped, falling on his knees before the Abbe. "Fort Frontenac is destroyed by the English, its vessels given to the flames; the town sacked — burned to the ground." Then he fell forward on his face, his head striking the boards heavily, causing the reverend man to shiver.

"Oh, my New France," he whispered. "What days are yet in store for thee." And he leaned his head on one hand to weep tears of agony.

Captain de Celeron was first to recover from the silence falling on the room. Quickly commanding that attention be given to the fallen man, he moved to the Abbe, touching his shoulder respectfully. "I beseech you, restrain your grief, reverend sir," he said. "Think on the soldiers — your example —"

"I thank you, young sir. Thank you for reminding a weak priest, a strong hand is necessary for the preservation of my master's country." Then he dashed aside his tears, to say

calmly, "Is the messenger recovered? Can he give us news of this fearful disaster?"

The tattered man, whose rags gave slight indication of his rank, struggled to his feet; greedily swallowed a vessel of brandy at the hands of Sergeant Pere, and faced the two seated at the table.

"I am better, reverend sir," he said. "Am able to give you news of the greatest disaster befalling New France since when, I know not. Captain de Noyan surrendered to the English on the morning of the twenty-seventh of August. The enemy opened fire on us at five hundred yards, then took up position behind the old entrenchment, close at hand. We were few in numbers, and were forced to retire, after a fierce resistance."

"Oh, De Vaudreil," the Abbe interrupted sadly, thinking of the urgent message he had dispatched to him but a short while gone — requesting immediate reënforcement of the fallen Fort. A message heedlessly received, it seemed; as heedlessly neglected. "Oh, De Vaudreil, your inattention hath cost the King of France a jewel he can ill spare." Then he motioned the messenger to continue.

"As I say, we were weak in numbers, reverend sir," he said in a low voice. "I was secretary to Captain de Noyan, and know the strength to a man. Bradstreet laid siege to us for two days, and we were compelled to surrender. He marched in, the Fort was blown to atoms, the stores in town — and they were plentiful for the feeding of an army corps — given to the flames, as were the vessels in harbor, save two. They, being loaded with valuable furs, were carried off."

"And then?" came the solemn question, for the fall of such an important post as Fort Frontenac was a crippling blow to a country soon to be at death grips with the most powerful nation on earth. "And then? Speak, man. Haste! I must know the worst."

"The enemy departed as swiftly as they came. I escaped. Came hither in pursuit of your reverence. Some strong hand is necessary now."

The Abbe paid little attention to the compliment on his ability. "Ill news travels apace," he said, "but fast as it travels I must go faster in search of Montcalm. Have you news of his whereabouts?" he demanded impatiently.

"Where he may be at this hour?"

"The last dispatch from his army states he lies before Ticonderoga—" But his questioner waited for no more.

"Captain de Celeron," he said shortly, "give orders to my men to prepare for a long journey. At once! Rouse my Indians on the instant." The young officer ventured a remonstrance at the lateness of the hour, but was impatiently brushed aside. "Late, you say. If 'twere later, I would go. I know no clock when my country's welfare is at stake. Haste, I say. Would you have me go myself?"

Within the space of thirty minutes the large canoe was ready. The Abbe stood with Captain de Celeron, to give a last instruction. "See that the prisoner be kept closely guarded — on second thought —" here he motioned the fat secretary to his side, "Ambrose, I leave him in your care. This officer will have enough to do in preparing for winter. And you, young sir, heed me. Summon the Missassagas hither in the morning. Say to them, their Father commands their assistance. And above all things, lose little time in seeking out the hand that dared to fire the property of our Gracious King. Deal with him — you understand?" As the man at his side bowed low —"I leave all to you. I trust you will prove worthy of the great confidence reposed upon you. And further — a word in your ear — should the English appear here, as they will most likely do in following up their recent success, destroy this place. Burn it to the ground, rather than allow a store of good things to fall into worthless hands. You may not hold out against them with such poor assistance. Remember, young sir, follow my instructions to the word." And Captain de Celeron bowed once again. Inwardly he chuckled. His was a free hand now. The spy? He permitted a smile to wreath his lips, as he answered that question to his complete satisfaction.

While the one conversed and the other attentively listened, they had walked to the shore. For the moment the Abbe stood lost in thought. The destruction of Fort Frontenac was like to upset all his carefully prepared plans. He sighed heavily, pondering where he was like to find General Montcalm and whether that gentleman would, or would not, be persuaded to his own determination. Ambrose followed them, a smile on his fat face, that showed his pleasure at being omitted from

such a hurried journey, and Captain de Celeron, watching his features, fell to wondering how he might override a man whose sole thought was for personal comfort.

Sergeant Pere, unperceived, had taken his prisoner to the "pit." As he passed his quarters, he procured several blankets, passed over to the young man who nodded his thanks. The two raised the heavy trap, and as the younger was about to descend, the older said, "There is but little hope for better accommodation this night. I will not say to her where you are to pass its hours. Lose not hope, my brave. You are not dead as yet. She — your own — hath the fat one by the ear. Knows the road to his favor. It lies through his paunch, or I am much mistaken. He is left behind in charge of you, and I will feed him well. Trust me. Good night." Then he hastily let fall the trap with a thunderous bang. "Name of a fish," he muttered as he hurried to the beach, "'tis a proper swine's den. I would the pair who placed him there were made to dwell within it for a year." Then he caught sight of McLeod, also hastening to the beach.

"We had best follow to see the last of him," the storekeeper said.

"Aye. I trust 'twill be the last I ever see of him. He makes my neck itch. I dreamed of twisted ropes all night long." Then they came to the shore.

"I may return later," the Abbe was saying to Captain de Celeron, while Ambrose, important and pompous, stood near. "I may, but should aught prevent me, remember my instructions. Follow them to the letter." Then his eye chanced on the secretary. "Ambrose, take heed what you do here. I leave you as teacher and confidant of the prisoner. He is in your charge. I trust *you* will prove worthy of the task. Find out from him all he knows of the doings of the English, you hear? And allow not gluttony to overcome diligence, or when I meet you again —"

Under the red glare of torches held in the hands of a garrison drawn up to do him honor, the Abbe stepped into the waiting canoe. As he was borne away over the smooth waters, his stern voice floated back to the watchers on the shore. "Remember, my children. Follow my instructions." Then the darkness swallowed him up, and though he little thought it, his last honor had been paid at the outpost he hurried from.

As the last dip of paddles faded into silence, Captain de Celeron turned to the storekeeper and his sub. His voice, grim, his manner harsh to extremity, as he said, "There is much I have to say to you, McLeod. Sergeant Pere," and the old one stiffly saluted, "I think your tale to his reverence of my doings needs explanation. Lead on to the storehouse. Dawn is at hand, and I want the truth."

The soldiers retired to the stockade, Sergeant Pere with his crony marching silent, side by side, Captain de Celeron bringing up the rear, with panting Ambrose for companion.

"An you need truth you shall have it," the old soldier muttered savagely. "You may find it little to your liking. 'Tis easy for common soldiers to find excuse for drunkenness. Punishment to them but loss of a few days' freedom. You may find a commission lost to you, do you go too far with me. Yon headstrong boy thinks to play with his old dry nurse, well — we will see about that matter."

CHAPTER XX

WHY CAPTAIN DE CELERON SAVED THE MAN HE HATED

THE return journey to the Fort seemed a long distance to Captain de Celeron. Though his brain was clear, his gait was unsteady. He discovered a senile weakness affecting his limbs, and placed their refusal to do exactly as he desired to the nostrums of the doctor, who had warned him carefully of excitement. Yet, one thing he determined on. He would have every detail of what had happened while he had been — indisposed, he named it, for want of a better term.

"None stands between me and the spy," he muttered, "that is — none save a fat man who may easily be molded to my will. I dare not offend his master, but I think that the servant is of a different cast." Coming close to his moaning companion, he said respectfully, "You have but a short task ahead of you, sir. The prisoner will no doubt prove a stubborn, contumacious dog. One you will doubtless be glad to be rid of." But his only reply was a nod, for Ambrose was unequal to speech, the ascent to the Fort was steep, and his legs were short; his rotund person weighty for their strength to carry. "His reverence, of course, thoroughly intended you to be speedy with him," he ventured, "I, as military commander here, care not for the company of spies." And Ambrose came to an abrupt halt.

"I — I, have, ah — my instructions — young — young sir," he gasped. "When we — I, ah — come to the Fort, I shall do as I am — am bidden." Then he resumed his waddling gait, exceeding glad when the sentry challenged, and at last admitted the company.

"I understood — that is, the Abbe no doubt intended — you to be brief," Captain de Celeron persisted, as they stood under the lantern-lit archway. "Of course you will be pleased to be rid of such a fellow."

Ambrose, with difficulty recovering his spent breath, silently stared his disapproval at such intrusion on learned authority. The prisoner was the first man to fall under his own immediate

direction. Some fine flights of oratory lay in store for his hearing, hidden within the recesses of a brain that needed but a worthy subject to produce eloquence. This young officer was somewhat presumptuous to meddle with what did not concern his military authority. He must be taught that His Reverence the Abbe Picquet always chose the right man.

"Young sir," he said at last, "my master knew what he did when the man was placed in my care. Time is of small value so that I may please him."

"Sir, I doubt not your desire to please, but this man is a spy. Your master knew that fact. 'Twas but his hurried departure that spared the rope, and of course, you must understand, though the Abbe be powerful, he is subject to the King of France, a greater master, yours, as he is mine."

"The King of France is not here, young sir. The Abbe is. I, as his humble secretary and most dutiful servant, will not permit one single infraction of his last order." And Captain de Celeron gritted his teeth. He began to see some space of time elapsing ere the spy was his to do as he pleased with.

"To venture interference between your authority is something I am beyond," he said hastily. He must by no means fall out with this pompous puppet of a brief command. "I meant no harm, Monsieur Secretary; I but desired to call attention to the danger of a spy, loose within these walls I have the honor to command."

Ambrose smiled graciously, completely deceived by the humility of the answer. He was of easy going disposition — that is, so long as nothing interfered with his personal comfort. Another most important matter had to be considered. His heart was very weak. The least excitement brought on unpleasant dizziness, and he had been warned to avoid all subjects that led to heat of temper. This young officer was perhaps only cautious; had intended kindness in place of interference. Well, there would be plenty of time to discuss the matter on the morrow.

"I am very weary," he said slowly. "Exceeding tired and hungry. My poor body requires much sustenance to support its weight." The last with an air of apology, as his companion smiled. "Think you, young sir, 'tis too late to procure a small morsel ere I retire?"

"'Tis never too late to provide aught you may desire, monsieur," Captain de Celeron replied with a low bow. "Sergeant Pere," he called, "conduct this gentleman to your lodging — he will rest there for the night — and set Peche to wait on him. The men may dismiss. After you attend my orders, attend me." With another bow, he moved off, followed by the storekeeper, toward the storehouse.

Sergeant Pere led the way to his lodging, Ambrose wheezing behind, and as he walked, he smiled. He thought he saw a way to ease the strict accommodation of a prisoner. "They do not agree," he grinned. "The young one thinks to have his way, but the fat thinker is determined to do as he pleases. Perhaps my stranger may be safer than either dreams of. Sure 'tis, I will do my best to have a few fingers in the pie." With this thought in mind, he roused Peche to a most unwelcome midnight task, saw a bounteous meal spread on the table, and humbly attended to a delighted Ambrose. "You have but to whisper, learned sir," he said softly. "I shall always be pleased to attend you."

"Ah," replied the other, an unctuous smile upon his fat lips, "I trust to satisfy appetite, good soldier — nothing more,— nothing more."

"With your permission I must leave you now," the old man said. "My officer requires my presence. He is keen on spies."

"Is he to be examined to-night, and I not there?" Ambrose said hurriedly. "'Tis not to be thought on — not for one moment. I will not have it," he blustered, and again the Sergeant smiled.

"Nay, nay, Monsieur Secretary, 'tis not his doings, 'tis my own that require some attention."

"Ah — well, then — of course, I shall not attend. Should you hear aught that would be pleasing to my master, good soldier, er —" And the fat one smiled graciously, while his companion bowing low, promised faithfully to retail all that was likely to be of interest.

"Good night, learned m'sieu," he said, backing out from his quarters. But when the door closed, he said to himself, "Name of a fish, but the Abbe was thoughtful to leave him behind. He will save one I know of from a tight collar if De Celeron attempt dealing in hemp. He may be brought to

reason, but when love enters folly comes." Then he reached the storehouse, finding his officer engaged with the tall doctor. "Another left behind to pray for us. We shall do well for sanctity in this place." The last words, a silent comment.

"But, young sir," Brother Alonzo was saying earnestly, "I must follow the Abbe, my master. I am his medical attendant. I must depart and that at once." The last in wavering tones.

"I know not who is to attend you, reverend sir," Captain de Celeron said in a vexed voice. This addition to his forces he was far from finding pleasant. One fat man was enough to contend with. This spare doctor was of different mentality. Might see and hear too much. Yet, how was he to be removed? "I know not who will attend you," he added as Brother Alonzo sighed.

"Ah,— well, of course,— if I must stay," he said. Then to himself. "Hippocrates would have welcomed such intervention. Head wounds — two subjects — male and female. Humph! I may discover some new symptom for my treatise. Some most important knowledge." Without another word he returned to his patients, lost to all else save science and its advancement at his willing hands.

Captain de Celeron followed his going with a glance expressive of contempt. Then he turned, shrugging his shoulders, to seat himself at the table. "Now," he said, "now, McLeod, and you, Sergeant Pere, prepare to speak the truth. You first, Pere, and remember I am not a priest, who believes every confession to be truth."

The storekeeper, though his heart was filled with thankfulness at the certainty his hands were free from murder stain, discovered the old resentment still alive within his breast. The domineering tone of the man he had well-nigh murdered was a breeze to the blaze of his dislike. On the instant he made up his mind to dispatch a messenger to Quebec, requesting removal to some other post. Secretly, if open permission were denied. In the meantime, for his daughter's sake, he must abide by the autocratic rule of this haughty youngster. For even yet, at this eleventh hour, he hoped to escape the consequences of his struggle in the guardhouse. How? he left to fate.

"Well, Pere?" he heard the object of his dislike say, and

he paid a full attention, "What have *you* to say? I have heard a story. The attack on this place may be true. I was indisposed at that time. Suffering from the effects of a blow. A blow delivered by whom? Whom?"

Sergeant Pere, standing rigid, rapidly turned the matter over in his mind. If he took the whole affair on his own shoulders would his crony escape? Would Madeline be the better off? But would his officer accept such a statement, that a sergeant of foot, well knowing the dread consequences, dared strike his superior officer? A short shrift would be his, he well knew; a flogging certain, as the least punishment for such crime. Death in either case, for he knew his old body, tough as it was, would wither like a cut-down weed in summer, under the strokes of a heavy lash.

"Answer me. At once," his officer demanded irritably. "Take not time to find a lie to fit the occasion." And that word "lie" determined Sergeant Pere.

"I did," he answered calmly, and McLeod gasped, "but there were aggravating circumstances."

"*You* did!" Captain de Celeron said in amazement. "You did, and you aware of the penalty? The rope."

The old man winced. If he persisted in his lie, the hangman's knot would blast a fair reputation forever. He gave one cautious glance at his crony, thought of Madeline, while the blood pumped to his leathery cheeks. Then saluting gravely, he answered in a steady voice—"I am," he said. "I have not served the King of France for so long a term, that I am ignorant of what waits those who strike his commissioned officers."

The young man sat immovable. His mind busy with reasons for such hitherto unheard of conduct on the part of so good a sub. He closed his eyes for a moment, to ease the ache in his brain, taken advantage of by Sergeant Pere, to give one warning shake of the head at McLeod, who stood with the air of a man petrified. He had heard his soldier friend to the end of a doubtful recital, half hoping that some way would open for escape. But the realization that honor, life — everything that a good soldier holds dear — would be deliberately sacrificed for himself, stabbed deep into his bosom.

Stung by a sense of cowardice, he half started forward. Flashed through his mind that possibly this boy-officer might

take a more lenient view of the matter, when he heard full particulars of a brave defense; the preservation of his own life when he lay senseless. That he might for very shame consign the whole affair to oblivion. And he waited. But he little suspected that the young man was disappointed; had hoped the fellow he termed spy had been the one to strike the blow. If such crime had been his, all the military authority in New France would rush to arms demanding the extreme penalty from the criminal. The Church, coming to know the true circumstances, pardon a violation of Her commands, extended in mercy to a common assassin.

"So, 'twas not the prisoner who dared lay hands on me," Captain de Celeron said slowly, and the two started at his words, for neither had so much as dreamed suspicion lay in that direction.

"He was nowhere near when the trouble happened," the old man answered stoutly. "He was in —" Here he hesitated, fearing to state where. That he had given house room to a spy was like to bring another storm cloud about his near submerged head.

With a frown, the young man glanced at his sub. "Are you hiding something from me?" he demanded. "Fool, that you are. Now, who was present at the time of the attack? What was the exact reason? How came you, a sergeant of long standing, to dare such offense? Why was the guard not called? Why?" he rasped, and the other, deliberately, with exceeding brevity, categorically replied.

"I was alone, my Captain," he said. "The reason, you assaulted me in the execution of my duty. You were — drunk. The guard was not called, as I did not wish to lower the discipline of my men. As to why — I, though an old man, dislike blows."

"You state then, your hand delivered the blow. That you alone are to blame."

"I am, if blame may fall on a man preserving his life," came the respectful answer, and the young officer, baffled in his one desire to establish the guilt of the man he hated, tapped aimlessly on the table top. And Sergeant Pere shivered. The drumming noise sounded exactly as sounds the muffled drum, heading a last respect to the dead.

Silence fell on the room for many minutes. Suddenly a

new suspicion entered the mind of the unthinking drummer. Had the girl — Madeline — any part in this mystery? Had he again demanded her presence in his cups? Insulted her? And had this old fool soldier, who loved her fair form to distraction, had he resented some fancied impertinence? Now, attempted to shelter her slender figure behind his own withered carcass? A smile came to his lips. He would see.

"McLeod," he said with a sneer, "was your daughter concerned in this matter?" Then sat back to observe the effect of his question.

"My daughter was at home, Captain de Celeron. With me, in fact, until I was summoned to the guardhouse. I was there to witness your disgraceful conduct as an officer — was there to witness the doings of a drunken madman. You — a disgrace to the clothes you wear. I was there, and 'twas my hand that struck you down, after — yes, some minutes after, your attempt upon my life."

The storekeeper folded his arms, calmly to await his fate. His crony scowled in his direction, but he did not see. He met the stare of an angry man, crimsoned to the forehead, who seized the table-top to prevent a swaying body tumbling to the floor.

"You! You!" he stuttered, with white lips. "You dared," he gasped, falling back into his chair, while Sergeant Pere cursed the castle of fabrication he had erected, now ruined and useless. Then McLeod thoroughly aroused came close; bent down his white face to the level of the officer who might yet condemn his body to the gallows; hissed passionately —

"Yes," he said, "I dared. Dared fell you to the floor to preserve my own life. Sergeant Pere may bear witness, an he will — of your totally unprovoked attack upon my person. Now — now, Captain de Celeron, do your worst. You dare not hang me — a civil servant — out of hand."

"No — No?" came the chill voice of a man recovering from a first surprise, but fully determined to exact the extreme price of a struggle near causing the loss of a most precious piece of paper. One, bearing the sign manual of the King of France. A parchment, that might bring honor; a marshal's baton — perhaps? Without that good writing, life, a cracked shell, oozing bitterness and disgrace. "No?" he said again. "We shall see — we shall see, Monsieur Storekeeper."

"We shall see, Captain de Celeron," came the haughty answer. "You may do what you will with the father — the daughter, do you dare harm her — the very soldiers under your command will rise in her protection."

The proud blood of the de Laudonnieres was fired to boiling point, at last. Bubbled over the lips of their only male representative in a wrathful stream, whose heat reddened the features of Captain de Celeron, and stung his very soul to madness.

Slowly he rose from his chair. Pointing with steady hand, he said deliberately, "Sergeant Pere, arrest that man. Keep him safe until the dawn. Then he shall have a priest to put him to sleep for the last time on earth. Now, I am satisfied — but remember," and his eyes glittered strangely, "I warn you, liar that you are, if he escape — you swing in his place."

The door of the adjoining room softly opened. Closed, on the shaking figure of a girl, who clutched at the rough wall against which she leaned for support. Her eyes were red from much weeping; the corners of a gentle mouth drooped, as if from many hours of anguish. Her raven hair was tumbled to a wild disorder, as she moved slowly to the side of her silent father.

"Where is he?" she whispered. "Where is he?" And Captain de Celeron overheard.

"Where is who, girl?" he demanded, and she walked toward him, with heaving bosom; eyes wide with terror.

"The prisoner," she replied calmly, striving for control. "The man detained by the Abbe. What have you done with him? You, Captain de Celeron, I demand to know. You dare not hang him at dawn. He was granted life by the Abbe Picquet. If you murder him, I will go on my knees to your master. Demand justice upon your head, his would-be murderer."

She spoke rapidly. Her arms extended as though to snatch a man from immediate death. Delirium sparkled her eyes to a wildness, mentally watching a loved form fading into that distance from which there is no return in the flesh. And the young man thought that never had any woman appealed to his inmost soul as this girl in her moment of agony.

"You are distressed, mademoiselle, at thought of a spy's death?" he sneered. "Be assured, he is not dead — yet."

"Who then," she stammered painfully, "who was to die at —" and she whispered the last word, "dawn?"

Sergeant Pere stared at his officer, seeking some trace of pity on the frowning face. But none was there. He scowled as Captain de Celeron answered coldly, "Your father, mademoiselle." And the girl fell on her knees, clutching the coat of a man who held the life of a parent between itching fingers.

"I beseech you to spare him," she moaned, with much humility, and as the young man smiled, Sergeant Pere discovered a murderous inclination curve his hands tight. "Spare him, I pray you," she said again, and the commander of Fort Toronto laughed.

"You kneel to me now, mademoiselle," he said with a jeer. "Time was when my love amused your moments — their passing changes the point of view, I perceive. I would not have you kneel to me." And assisted her to rise.

"I implore you to spare my poor father," she said passionately, paying no heed to his ridicule. "Anything — everything I have, I offer to you, an you will save his life."

A wicked smile hovered on the young man's lips. Coming close he whispered, "Your love, ma'amselle?" and she shrank away frightened, her heart near ceasing its beat, while two burning eyes of desire fed on her fair figure, and a pair of hot lips touched her white cheeks. "You do love me after all?" he repeated passionately. And she ran to her father.

He had not heard, nor had suspicion of the insulting whisper, or else murder might have stalked swiftly in upon the scene. He knew his little maid was fearful for himself, placed her alarm to thought of his coming end. "Never cry, dear," he said softly, much in the same manner as when a tiny tot had stumbled to a father's side to be comforted for some baby ill. In the days of long ago; in those dark hours when clinging fingers had been the only hope of one swimming to self-destruction. "Never cry, dear," he said again to this slim girl, grown so like her dear, dead mother. But his eyes filled with tears he feared she might discover, and he suddenly fell silent, holding her very, very close.

Sergeant Pere stood silently by; his scarred features now white, now red with suppressed anger. Once he had near stepped forward, when his little maid had kneeled to such a man. Then he remembered. 'Twould never do, he thought,

for the two of them to be jailed at one time. He suddenly moved forward, saluted woodenly, but the glare in his eyes warned the man he offered respect, that but a trifle more of tyranny would cause mutiny on the part of at least one soldier in New France. A sub-officer whose reputation was above suspicion; one whose rebellion might cause remark at headquarters, among those under whom he had served with distinction, should he be forced to discard obedience.

"Captain de Celeron," he said, meeting squarely the eyes of the other, "as sub-commander of the Fort, may I beg that you reconsider your decision? Allow one night at least to elapse ere sentencing an honest man to death. Time may change your mind, my Captain. Hasty decisions are not of the best." He desired time himself. Time to gather a plan of escape for the only two he loved on earth. Flight, with all its consequences to a soldier deserting the colors. A shudder rippled up his spine. Some might term flight, desertion. That hideous sound more horrible than all the moments of a hanging. But he persisted. "I have not asked so many favors," he said, and waited.

Captain de Celeron started. Possibly, he had been hasty. Perhaps the danger of the father might move the daughter to consent a hearing, and that hearing gain consent to passion. Summoning a smile to his lips, he said gently, "Perhaps," he admitted, "perhaps I have been a trifle quick in passing sentence. You may remove him to —" He hesitated. 'Twould never do, he thought, to place two such dangerous prisoners as a father and lover together in one prison.

"I will do sentry go for him, Captain de Celeron," Sergeant Pere said hurriedly, "that is, an you think such course necessary. If the storekeeper be permitted to remain here with his daughter, I will be his guard."

"That will do for a time, until other safety may be provided," the young man said, rising from his chair as if to end the scene. "But, Sergeant, a word in your ear. See no night escape is possible. You understand? Hanging is a most unpleasant death."

With these words he stalked from the room. The very sight of the girl roused all the passion of his hot nature, and he dare not trust himself further. When the door banged on his retreating figure, three silent people stood waiting. Each

doubtful, each dreading the future, that might yet separate their troubled number.

The old man was first to recover use of his tongue. "Name of a fish, my friend," he said viciously, "but of all the idiots in this spot, you surely possess least wit. Just when he began to believe my lies, you must saddle yourself with blame. Phut!" he ended, repressing a desire to swear, in the effort to ease his feelings.

Then a slender figure ran to his side; two tender arms were flung about his neck and a pair of sweet lips pressed many kisses on his leathery cheeks. "Oh," she said, trembling with emotion, "you are brave. I heard — all, but thought 'twas Francis you hoped to save." Again she returned to her father, white and silent, trying to comfort him with many fond caresses, and the repeated assurance that Sergeant Pere was the best friend a pair of helpless people might have; that he would stand at their side, come what would, happen what might.

"Aye, I will, little one, have no fear on that point," the old man said hastily. "Your father knows me. All may be well even yet. I bested the Abbe, will try to get the better of this boy-officer. Name of a fish, but they are a pretty pair to serve New France."

"I would you understood how much I am indebted to you, old friend," McLeod muttered brokenly.

"To me?" came the irritable interruption. "To me! And I with an account on the books as long as the flag over the Fort. You must be mistaken. 'Tis the other way about, and as I like not to be reminded of what I owe, we will forget it. In any case the father of my little maid could owe me naught."

The inner room door opened cautiously. Brother Alonzo entered quietly, a smile of pity on his thin features. "Is the maid about who waits on the sick ones?" he asked gently. "I desire her presence for a moment — that is, if she be not otherwise engaged."

Madeline kissed her father, released herself from his clinging arms and came forward with a low reverence. "I will come at once," she said. "Take good care of him, Sergeant." And with a deep sigh disappeared.

Brother Alonzo hesitated for a moment. "You are both brave men," he said quietly. "I overheard. This good sol-

dier is somewhat rashly outspoken where authority is concerned, but he may well be forgiven under the circumstances. This young officer of yours is over hasty, I fear. The Church shall protect you both. My master, the Abbe, shall be informed of the true facts. I would not speak so loudly of one who has climbed high in the Councils of New France, soldier. My blessing, my sons." Then he absently moved away. Turned to the inner room, keenly intent on ministering to the needs of his patients.

"He had me there," Sergeant Pere grinned, as the door closed on the kind physician. "He is a decent soul, though, for all he is a priest. 'Tis Madeline who has bewitched him to assist us. Two men, sworn bachelors, both at her feet." His mouth expanded to a grin. Help was coming where he least expected.

"She is a dear girl," the father muttered. "A dear girl — all that is left to me — For how long I wonder? How long?"

"Better rest, my friend," the old man said, with a glance of pity. But the other only shook his head, and covered his face with shaking hands. The sound of muttering followed, and Sergeant Pere knew his crony besought aid for the safety of a daughter, whose existence without a father's care would be one of loneliness and misery.

With frowning face he passed outside. Beneath the silent stars, pacing to and fro, he cudgeled his wits to provide some plan of assistance for two men and a maid. He could see no immediate danger for Madeline. Some faith he had remaining in the honor of French officers. That Captain de Celeron intended harm to her, never crossed his mind. Marriage, the lovesick swain might press upon her unwilling form — dishonor — insult! Surely a gentleman would scorn that. As for the storekeeper and the prisoner, the father and the lover, they must be removed at once. But how? How? That thought occupied anxious hours without solution.

The stars faded into the pearl gray of the dawn, and yet the problem remained unsolved. The old soldier wearily pacing the soundless sand stood still. "Another day," he muttered. "One day nearer the end. Name of a fish," he added with a scowl, "but I grow old. I must husband my strength for her sake. She, at least, shall be safe while I live. As for the

father and the sweetheart, both their necks be in some danger, as mine will be,"— here he fingered his scrawny throat tenderly,— "if I assist their escape. Well —'tis three to one — death by the rope. I will take the odds."

CHAPTER XXI

HOW AMBROSE DELIVERED A MAN FROM PRISON

WHEN the stout secretary arose from the hard pallet Sergeant Pere termed a bed, his fat body ached with numberless pains, the result of long travel, and the uneasy couch on which he had passed the short hours since the departure of his master, and the present moment — eleven of the morning.

"'Tis weary work, this," he grumbled, waddling to the open casement to peer out to the busy stockaded enclosure. "I would I had never left Mount Royal, but we of Holy Church must suffer in Her cause."

Then he moved slowly across the floor, his eyes wandering to the storehouse. A smell of cooking came down the wind from the cookhouse, and of their own accord his fat legs traveled in that direction. "Ah," he said, sniffing the fresh, pine-scented air of outside, "what an appetite is gained by early rising." But as the hour drew near to dinner time he was the only one at Fort Toronto possessed of the opinion that near on half after eleven was seasonable arising. This fact, the soldier cook was soon to impress on his belated wits.

He came to the open door, from whose narrow space issued fragrant perfume of good things, confidently expecting to find the maid who had taken compassion on his hunger the previous day. But he discovered a tall, thin man in her place, busily engaged in the molding of lumps of flabby looking dough. In the interval of their placement on earthen plates, he busily attended to various huge copper pots, all simmering merrily, on the top of a red hot clay oven. And the succulent savor issuing from their boiling depths added to an appetite already ravenous.

"Is the maiden who attended me yesterday within call?" he asked very gently.

The cook waved a floury hand in his direction. In a most surly manner waved him off. "No, indeed," he said. "Ma'amselle was here, as I now know to my cost. A fine

mess women make, when they meddle with the tools of men." Without a glance he turned to his occupation, and the visitor stood wondering at such cool reception.

Had he only known how much good French brandy had gone to the removing of one cook; and how badly that cook's head ached at the moment he might not have wondered. But being ignorant of the diplomacy of the girl he sought, to please his master, he persisted in his determination to eat. "My friend," he smiled, "possibly you — may assist a hungry man to a morsel of breakfast."

"Breakfast," the cook shrieked. "Breakfast, and dinner hour nigh at hand? If 'tis such you require, come again tomorrow at five. Breakfast! At this hour. You will get no such meal this day." Then he strode outside his domain, swearing lustily, calling on many strange deities to witness that not one scrap of food should leave his hands until the appointed time set by military order and common usage. So angry was he, so excited his gestures, emphasized by a long iron spoon, that Ambrose gathered up his robe and fled toward the storehouse, leaving the presence of so uncouth a being, who, having beaten off the intruder, returned triumphantly to his tasks. "What does he think this to be?" he growled. "An ordinary? A Paris place of eating at all hours? I will show him." And when the soldiers came to receive their dinner, he had not yet recovered good temper.

Ambrose moved disconsolately off toward the storehouse, being received by Sergeant Pere, who, after attempting a brief two-hour sleep upon a bale of skins, had been forced to rise. The storekeeper under arrest, compelled his unskilled attention to the few customers who came to trade. For the first time in his eventful life, he tried the part of storekeeper. "What ails you, Monsieur Secretary?" he asked coming from behind the slab counter, noting the abject manner of the man he desired to stand well with. "Is there aught I may do?" he added, placing a chair, on which Ambrose gladly placed his weight, at once dolorously commencing to relate his troubles.

The old man promptly forgot his hastily assumed rôle. He left the tending of two ancient squaws, fingering some silver trinkets — costing a few francs at the makers, but now worth many times their paltry weight in fur — to lend an anxious ear. And as soon as his back was turned, the women seized an unex-

pected opportunity to annex the articles they ardently desired. Then, with many mutterings at the high price demanded, openly sneering at the new trader's inexperience, they hurried from the house. But he little remarked their disappearance. He was more concerned in the pleasing of a grumbler, who might unconsciously assist the stranger in the "pit."

"You slept well?" he asked solicitously. "You had my own bed to sleep on. I trust 'twas to your liking?" And the other regarded him suspiciously.

"You pass each night on it, good soldier?" he said slowly, for the bed was hard enough to warrant thoughts of practical joking. "'Twas as you use it?"

"When not on duty, I do, Monsieur Secretary," the old man smiled. "Mother Earth is a stone to the place you used, and many a night I use that couch."

Ambrose ruefully shook his head. Some other accommodation would have to be provided for his weight, he thought. Another night on such a pallet was not to be dreamed on, much less endured. "Though I am soldier of the Church militant," he began, in a tone modeled on that of his master, "at even, when labor is over for the day, I at least desire comfortable rest." And his companion thought that much might be done with a man who valued creature comforts so highly.

"Would it please you to eat a morsel?" he asked respectfully. "A trifle of venison, with a slice or two of white bread, and, say — a pint of wine to wash them down?" Most humbly did he speak, with difficulty repressing the broad grin rising to his lips.

"'Tis true, I am somewhat hungered," Ambrose replied, a look of gratitude beaming in his small eyes. "If the trifles you suggest were immediately forthcoming, I might make shift to appease my appetite until the hour of dinner."

On the instant Sergeant Pere departed, and as his lank form faded from view at the cookhouse door, the secretary communed with thought as to the character of his friend in need. "He is rough," he muttered, "doubtless that arises from his soldier occupation. He is of a kindly disposition, that may be seen at a glance. I will come to him in the future should I at any time be unable to bear with fortitude the dire pangs of hunger. Ah!" he added, smiling, moving to a chair near the window, "this is a most pleasant place in which to sojourn

— now that the Abbe has departed."

He was not long kept waiting. In a short while Sergeant Pere set before him a platter heaped high with good things. A cobwebbed bottle, promising much from its aged appearance, accompanied a juicy venison steak, flanked by two green cobs of corn, eloquent of tastiness in their steaming fragrance. Without a word of thanks he set to. Seated on an old chair, placed before an upturned barrel, close to an open window that permitted stray breezes to enter the low room, Ambrose was in his element.

Sergeant Pere placed a screen of skins about the eater. Then retiring to his place behind the counter, he muttered many comments on the behavior of his visitor. "My maid would have done exactly so," he said softly. "She understands him. She has the art of winning man. First the stern one, then this fat one, then the lean one — all at her feet. As for the stranger, he would be carpet to her all the days of his life." Then he scowled. "I trust I may succeed with this last one. He is our only hope against De Celeron, and if he is to be gained by feeding, I will stuff him so full he will never leave my side save to sleep." And he grinned, not daring to laugh out loud lest the secretary, busy eating, should overhear and suspect ridicule of himself.

An hour elapsed ere the old soldier thought to interrupt a man at his pleasant occupation. "I must give him time," he said. "Then I will hint at Birnon. Take him past his prison. 'Tis the only way I may hope to secure release from that cursed swine's den." Quietly he moved across the floor, peered round the skins, saying softly, "I trust the viands pleased you, monsieur. The noon repast will be soon served." The last with a scowl, as the eyes of the other slowly opened. Sleep waited on good digestion.

"Ah — hum — yes, good soldier, the red wine was indeed delicious. Delicious indeed to a thirsty soul. With your permission I will retire. I am exceeding weary after my long journey." And Sergeant Pere stared his dismay. Here was not the slightest prospect of relief for the starving man he thought to succor.

"As you will, monsieur," he said outwardly respectful, but inwardly raging. "An you will come with me I will escort you across the stockade."

Ambrose grudgingly removed his weight from the comfortable chair. Waddled over the dusty enclosure, purposely led by his host near the "pit." "One moment, learned monsieur," the old man said, stooping to lift with an effort the heavy trap-door. "The prisoner has evidently been forgotten. I will admit light and air to him."

"Saints above preserve us," gasped the secretary, starting back from the yawning depth at his feet, sleep wiped from his eyes at thought of possible horrors lying grisly in wait below. "Who lies there?" he demanded. "Not the prisoner. Not the man I am to reason with. Of a certainty I will never venture down there. 'Tis not to be expected of me."

Sergeant Pere frowned dubiously. "If you command it, I will order him removed," he said, in a voice he made harsh as possible to fit the occasion. "Captain de Celeron is commander here, and I must obey." The last with a frown of doubt, but complete inward satisfaction. His plan was like to succeed.

"I will not imperil my body on such a frail ladder for all the Captain de Celerons in this wide world," Ambrose gasped. "My master never intended I should do so."

"An you command —" the old man began, interrupted quickly by his blustering companion.

"I do. At once," he panted. "Your officer is no commander of my body. He may order his men as he see fit, but the Abbe Picquet, whose secretary and confidential I am, never intended a trusty man to descend to depths unknown. Remove the prisoner. At once," he added, puffing with excitement; violently red in the face at bare thought of such interference with his own private instructions.

Sergeant Pere slid to the bottom of the "pit." "Stranger. Stranger," he whispered, as Birnon arose from a damp bed, to shade blinking eyes from the floodlight pouring in above. "Listen for your life's sake. The fat one waits above. I have set a flea in his ear. He already dislikes De Celeron. Is wroth at your confinement in this hole. Walk carefully — gain his favor if possible. Say you fear the displeasure of my little Captain — that is, if not able to speak, write him — the fat one — that much. I cannot say more at present. Ask to remain here. Now up. Up! I say. Leave escape to me, and on your life, walk warily."

The prisoner nodded. He understood the ruse. The order of the Abbe, that he was placed in care of the fat man, had not escaped him. He knew time was necessary. If hours were needed to plan escape, then he would prove strangely dull to the questioning of a duller man. Slowly he climbed out of the "pit," in keeping with his assumed character, one afraid to venture forth to stand before the amazed Ambrose, a wretched scarecrow, whose bewildered appearance seemed that of one losing wit.

"Is this the man?" the fat one gasped. "Wounded! and in such dreadful plight." And as he received a doubting nod in reply, he added with some concern, "Dumb! Dumb! He is indeed to be pitied."

"But, Monsieur Secretary," Sergeant Pere said harshly, "he is a pestilent spy. I pity you, in the task before you."

Ambrose closed his eyes for the fraction of a second. This poor wretch shivering in the sunlight was a most pitiable object. He crossed himself devoutly, praying he might never fall so low. "'Tis shameful," he said, "to keep him in so horrible a spot."

"He is a hard nut," came the angry mutter, as the old man winked one eye at his prisoner. "We keep him safe. He lies below, until we swing him higher." And Francis Birnon seized with an inspiration, turned to the ladder, hastily commencing to descend. All of which impromptu acting deeply impressed the startled secretary.

"He desires to return?" he gasped. "He must be mad with fear."

"He dreads my officer," the sergeant ventured, with a black look.

"Methinks you soldiers be much too harsh," Ambrose said warningly. "Much too harsh. This poor fellow is condemned to death, but at the least, a decent prison should comfort his last hour." And Sergeant Pere inwardly grinned, though in his heart grew a respect for the kindly thought.

"Captain de Celeron gave orders," he commenced hurriedly, but was interrupted by a secretary reddened to extremity in feature.

"Captain de Celeron is a soldier, I am a clerk," he said quickly, with some dignity of manner. "He, I think, is something of a savage in such treatment of so grievously wounded

a prisoner, whose prison is a reeking abomination. I will not have it," he blustered. "Not for one moment. Captain de Celeron —"

"What of him, Monsieur Secretary?" a smooth voice said at his ear, and he turned, starting, somewhat fearful, coming face to face with the man whose name he used. "What of him?" the other asked quietly, and for a few moments Ambrose remained silent.

"I — I — ah,—" he commenced, stupidly staring, and again the smooth voice repeated —

"You used my name, Monsieur Secretary. I regret, I startle you, but my name was mentioned, and I allow no man to take liberties with that in my absence."

"Liberty! Liberty, young sir," stuttered the fat one, "I but used your name to this good soldier who carries out your orders."

"I overheard you," came the cool rejoinder, "and desire to know the reason."

"I — I — this prisoner —"

"Is a most contumacious dog, Monsieur, as I warned you," the young man said with a winning smile. "I perceive you have already held some conversation with him — have found him as I say."

"I have ordered him to a more proper lodging," Ambrose replied, striving to regain composure. "One more in accordance with French hospitality, and the wishes of my master."

Captain de Celeron frowned. "He is a military prisoner," he said sharply. "A spy, and under my hands."

"And also under mine, young sir," Ambrose stammered, somewhat alarmed at the gleam of passion in the eyes he faced. "Under mine, at the command of His Reverence the Abbe Picquet."

"Who would be first to acknowledge military precedence," the other burst out angrily. "I dare you to interfere further in this matter." And suddenly Ambrose regained his composure at the imperious tone.

"My master is first in this land," he said calmly. "And since you take so high a hand, I dare you to defy his authority, vested in me his secretary."

Captain de Celeron turned pale with anger. Striding close, with clenched hands, he almost hissed, "Have a care how you

interfere, Monsieur Clerk. If this man escapes by your connivance, I will string you up in his place, and the birds will feast finely on such a carcass." Then he turned to Sergeant Pere, standing a silent listener, "You too, take care. Bear in mind you are under my command, and I suspect your hand in this matter. I have not forgotten your brazen effrontery in daring a lie to me, remember that. As for this fellow, place him where you will, but by God who made me, if he disappear you shall swing with a clerk for company, if he be not forthcoming when I need him."

Ambrose, though inwardly trembling, ventured to interfere. "Young sir," he said, "this good soldier is not to blame. He kindly took pity on an unfortunate appetite — was about to conduct me to a place of repose. We passed this most abominable spot, and I, as a pitiful man, desired that some other accommodation should be provided for a wounded enemy. If harm be done, mine the fault." He smiled benevolently, desirous of retaining the good will of so hotheaded an officer, in whose company many days were likely to be passed. "Mine alone the fault."

With curling lip expressive of contempt, an angry glance that enveloped every rotund line of the other's garments, Captain de Celeron sneered, "Your appetite is indeed unfortunate, Monsieur Secretary. Gave you as much time to meditating on your sins, as you do the pampering of your gross body, you might in time become a better man."

Ambrose gasped at the outrageous insult to his portly dignity. His face turned an unhealthy hue, which was as near white as he could compass at his time of life. Then he cast aside fear. Came near shouting, so angry was he at the reference to his desire for feeding. "Boy," he stammered —"for boy you be, both in age and manner — dare you speak to one of my years in so impertinent a fashion? I warn you," and he shook a fat hand in the air, "repeat such insult, and I will immediately to those in authority, who will have you well beaten for your insolent daring. One word more, and the Abbe shall deal with you." Then speech forsook his trembling lips, and he waddled off to the storehouse, his hair bristling with resentment.

Sergeant Pere, still as an image of wood, chuckled inwardly, until merriment became painful. Nothing could have

better pleased him. A mild interference he had planned for; a rupture, violent and open, something undreamed of in his wildest flights of fancy. "My little man will find himself in deep water," he thought. "He is in a proper sea of trouble. 'Twill do him a world of good." Then he fell to speculation. Fell a-dreaming of what his little maid would say at his interference to save the man she loved. Even now they might get away safely together. Live, the four of them, in a home of their own! A real home! One he had in his mind's vision, of a cottage, whose windows were vine-wreathed, and hung with roses. Grandchildren to ride on his stiff knees, to ask with lisping, curious tongues of the wilds in which he had lived. From whose savage depths he had rescued the two they knew as parents. What happy hours. . . .

"What ails you, fool?" a sharp voice broke in, and his cottage crashed ruinous about his ears. "What ails you that you stand grinning as though pleasure dwelt at your elbow?" And the old man came back to the land of reality; realized he was yet under the power of a man holding extreme penalties within his grasp.

"Your pardon, my Captain," he answered, coming quick to the salute. "I was but thinking, I —"

"I will do that," snapped the young man. "And at the moment I am thinking you play but a most unsatisfactory part in this matter. Why are you absent from the storehouse? Take care, my man, take care. You are not a clerk, vested with a priestly power to ride rough-shod over my authority. The lash is mine to use — remember that."

"Captain de Celeron," came the respectful reply, though red blood glared in a pair of steady eyes, "the secretary himself acquits me of blame. I regret the leaving of the storehouse. I will return."

"See that you do so, at once. Do not stir from there until I give you permission. Place the spy where you will, but, 'tis his life for yours — so remember."

Gnawing his lip, the young man strode off to the gateway. Maddened with rage, he stumbled past the sentry without so much as acknowledging the sharp salute. Fury was master at the moment. He cursed his own folly at a lack of tact. Here he had heedlessly, needlessly, offended the only man who stood between revenge and desire. He came to the leafy soli-

tude of the forest; paced the deserted aisles, cursing himself, his command, and not forgetting Ambrose who had protected the man he hated beyond measure.

The moment his commander disappeared, Sergeant Pere took Birnon by the shoulder, urging him toward the storehouse. "Name of a fish, lad, but De Celeron hates you and the fat one," he chuckled. "You must pay all attention to the latter. Wheedle, cajole, tell him tales — anything to keep his favor, after what he has done for you." Then as they reached the steps, "Name of a fish, why did not my nameless head think of it before? We have a lean doctor here. He cured my officer of dumbness, as you doubtless observed just now. Why should he not cure yours? We will to him on the instant. Come!" Clutching his companion, he hurried him up the short flight.

The storehouse was empty of customers — at least not one Indian waited at the counter, swept clean of trade goods in the absence of a storekeeper. If any had come seeking bargains, they had departed with what they desired, deferring payment to a more convenient season. That was evident, for not a single skin remained as exchange for many francs' worth of goods that morning gracing a wealth-covered counter. But Sergeant Pere paid little attention to such trifles. He was past caring for trade. He had gained one point, that of releasing a prisoner. Now he sought to gain another. The cure of the same individual.

Noisily he crossed the boards. Peered within the inner room. "Ho! McLeod," he shouted to the other, busy with the pages of a huge tome. "Where is the medicine man?" Then, in surprise at the smiling glance raised to meet his inquiring eyes, "Name of a fish, but you look pleased for a man condemned to the rope. I am right glad at the change though. Now, where is our long friend?" the last somewhat irritably. He knew something must have happened in his absence without his knowledge to cure his crony of so desperate an attack of black dog.

"You mean the good Brother?" McLeod said, rising. "If 'tis he you require, he has but this moment left me. Madeline is with him, caring for the sick ones. He is a proper good man," he added softly, and Sergeant Pere scowled.

"He ought to be, seeing 'tis the nature of his calling," came

his surly answer, for he was inclined to jealousy where his little maid was concerned, and liked none to stand with her fair figure as he thought he did himself. "These priests are the very devil with women," he added, and McLeod laughed.

"You will not quarrel with a man old enough to be her grandfather, will you?" he said. And again his crony wondered what had happened to make such change.

"No —" he replied slowly, as though turning that bare possibility over in his mind. And as a louder laugh greeted his hesitation, "Quarrel! I quarrel. I am the most peaceable man in —"

"In where, friend?" McLeod asked quickly, laughing so immoderately at the interruption he intended as a witticism, that again his companion stared amazed.

"I do not understand such change," he said. "For the life of me — no. I leave a man black as a thundercloud, return to find him like a summer morning. What has happened?"

"Take a seat. I will tell you."

"Nay, I must find the doctor. At once."

"Not on my account, Sergeant. I am quite sane. Hearken —" But the old man hurried from the room in search of his prisoner, returning with him, to leave the two together.

"I am needed inside," he said. "Two old hags desire to match their thievish wits with me." And once again he disappeared, his loud voice, raised in protest with his customers, reaching the ears of the storekeeper and his would-be son-in-law.

For some moments they remained silent, each intent upon a mental inventory of the other's quality. The older somewhat jealously inclined, the younger anxious to make a good impression. Then, the ice of hesitation was broken to fragments by the intrusion of Brother Alonzo, whose warm smile of welcome at thought of another patient rescued both father and lover from a most embarrassing silence.

"Wounds in profusion," he exclaimed pleasantly. "'Twas exceeding opportune I remained. A bad scratch," he added, removing with careful fingers the filthy bandage. "I must have assistance. Come, my daughter," he called, as Madeline, her fair features flushing a divine red rose, ran into the tattered arms of the man she loved.

"Dear one," she murmured, kissing him many times despite his dirt. "Thank God you are with me once again. Safe for at least one moment." And the lean doctor permitted a smile to hover on his lips, but the father frowned, turning away his head. An action Brother Alonzo was keen to notice.

"The doctor first, child," he said. "The doctor first, then Cupid. Science may heal the wound in his face; the wound in his heart, which I perceive is deep — exceeding deep — must be left to your care."

Sergeant Pere poked his head around the door. A grin hovered on his wide mouth as he winked knowingly at his old crony. "Name of a fish," he said, "but some I know have luck. Were I to be torn piecemeal by wild beasts or wounded by musket balls, 'twould be long ere I was fortunate to have sweetheart, nurse and doctor at my side." Madeline turned to smile at her slave. A smile that warmed his kind old heart; that nearly, but not quite, disposed of the jealousy gnawing the roots of affection planted deep within his breast.

"Were I to be wounded," she said softly, "I know of none I would rather have than a teasing old sergeant of foot." And on the instant he became boisterously hilarious.

"Come on, storekeeper," he laughed loudly, "let us leave the chickens together. Come on! Come and inform me how many pounds of sugar two old girls shall accept for two fox skins. There are two without who have in mind they will not accept less than a hogshead for two paltry pelts that grew some ten years gone on the backs of skinny animals, who were without doubt glad indeed to die to be rid of them. Come on." And the father reluctantly rose to follow.

After the customers had gone — the time, not less than an hour, so determined were they to get the best of the bargain — the old man sat down and wiped a perspiring forehead. "Name of a devil fish," he sighed, "but if all women be so sharp at a trade, I prefer to deal with men only, though they do deal in naught but hair." Then he added, casting a keen glance at his companion, "I am anxious to know a reason for this sudden change in you, friend."

"'Tis but this, chance of safety for my girl," was the satisfied reply. "The good doctor has promised to carry her with him when he goes."

Sergeant Pere stared with dropped jaw. His eyes opened

to their full extent. Without a word he rose and hurried from the room, leaving his crony pondering a most peculiar action.

"Poor old man, he takes it hard," he said aloud. "He loves her dearly, will sorely miss her merry tongue, and would play defender to her, if he had his way. But, much as he loves her, he could not protect her from De Celeron." With a sigh he added, "If I mistake not, he will soon have enough to do in protecting himself. The young upstart but waits opportunity to trip him up."

The old soldier, pacing the wide stoop, thought not of his own safety. Life and honor would be little indeed, if by casting both on one side, Madeline could secure escape. His own efforts had been spurned, counted nothing. Other arrangements had been made without his knowledge, for her safety. He was bitterly offended at that thought. Yet, he would have welcomed those efforts, if — he had only been taken into confidence. "'Tis a blow I shall never forget," he muttered. "McLeod passes me over for a stranger. I should have known better. Friends are all alike. The only one I ever trusted stole my wife, and I had known him twenty years."

Long, he paced the creaking boards. The bright eyes of a merry girl had lured his confidence; gained his love and respect. Her winning smiles were but the thoughtlessness of youth. She had not the slightest regard for him, or she would have found means to inform an old friend of what was going on. "Friends," he muttered bitterly, "have I not had experience with their ways? I would not have her know it, but I am stabbed deep." Then he walked off to his quarters. Perhaps wounded vanity, in addition to hurt affection, played a part in his anger of the moment.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW AMBROSE WAS DELIVERED FROM A FURIOUS FEMALE

THE setting sun gilded the swaying pine-tree tops to a golden sheen; the night winds sighed soft lullabies to their rustling branches above the head of a man spent with the passions of love, hatred and revenge, restlessly pacing beneath their fast-darkening shade.

Captain de Celeron became conscious he was playing a fool's part. The character of a spoilt child, robbed of desire for a moment. A fat secretary the thief, and he, a commissioned officer of New France, a veritable puling infant. Impatiently, with a shrug of broad shoulders, he sought to pull wandering wits together. He was ashamed, when he came to calmly contemplate his action of the morning. He had gone the wrong road. If he would succeed in possessing himself of the girl; if he would effectually separate her from the spy, he must assert military authority. But, first and immediately, apologies — humble explanations even — must be tendered to Ambrose. Muttering at his own folly, he hurried along the narrow trail leading toward the Fort.

"I must placate him," he said half aloud. "'Twas an idiot's act to even mention his appetite; to interfere with him at all. I should have known better. Were his master to hear of the matter, 'twould perhaps go hard with me. Father Picquet has a long arm, he might take me sorely to task for my military meddling — perhaps hear something of my — illness." He had the grace to hesitate over the last word. But that did not deter him from his purpose to immediately offer a most humble apology to Ambrose, a man he already disliked for several reasons.

He came to the storehouse to discover his grizzled sub-officer and McLeod busily engaged with a number of customers. He scowled at the latter, supposing him to be within his own lodging where he had been ordered to remain. As silence suddenly fell on the busy bustle of barter at his unexpected entrance, he said harshly, "You forget my order?" And the storekeeper

flushed red at the insolent manner of address.

"Captain de Celeron," he answered slowly, but quite calmly, "Sergeant Pere requested my assistance. I seek only the interests of New France in aught I do."

"An he is so slow of wit, he may not do without your help, you are better here than idle. Where is the secretary?"

"He is not here, m'sieu. We — I thought him with you." And McLeod raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Did he not come here, after — that is, to interview the spy?" The young officer glanced suspiciously about him, adding angrily. "Where is the fellow at this moment? Who has care of him?"

Sergeant Pere resigned his customer to the winds of chance. Stepping from behind the counter, he said respectfully, "He is at present with the doctor monk, my Captain." And the other frowned.

"Who ordered such attention?" he asked with sarcasm.

"No one, m'sieu. I, under your own orders, tended store. I was forced to keep an eye on the prisoner — he is worth a life to me — and brought him here. The doctor monk saw him and desired to examine his wound."

"I can understand who prompted such attention, my man, but let me tell you the priest had best pay more attention to his soul than to his wounded body. I warn you."

The old soldier had thrust upon him the fact that time was exceeding short in which to prepare a plan of escape for the lover of the girl he worshiped. Captain de Celeron was in grim, deadly earnest. That he knew. Choking back his desire to say more than he should of his thoughts, he replied quietly. "My Captain, I am blessed with but one pair of eyes — they, somewhat strained by age, and my body may not be on guard at the 'pit' and here in this place at one time. I —"

"Enough of insolence, Sergeant Pere," came the angry interruption. "You are relieved of duty in the storehouse. McLeod will resume his occupation for a time. Now, find the secretary for me. At once."

Captain de Celeron sneered; strode to the window, toying with the tassel of his sword hilt, while his sub, with a swift glance at the storekeeper, whose neglect of his counsel he had by no means forgotten or forgiven, hurried from the busy

scene and ran across the stockade to his lodging. The disappearance of the fat one troubled him little. No doubt he was safely snoring. His weight too heavy for short legs to carry very far. But an unpleasant surprise lay in wait for the messenger. When he peered inside his room he discovered nothing on the bed but the blankets. They undisturbed, tidily arranged as when his orderly had completed an everyday duty.

"Name of a fish," he muttered, "where can he have strayed?" Then he turned, a look of perplexity on his scarred face, and came to startle his officer with some unwelcome news. "He is not in my quarters," he said anxiously, and Captain de Celeron scowled.

"Is he in there?" he asked, pointing to the closed door of the inner room. "Haste! 'Tis growing dark."

Sergeant Pere tapped lightly on the panel, and being bidden to enter, his eyes caught sight of Francis Birnon rising rapidly from the side of his little cabbage. Brother Alonzo kept them a discreet company, but they might as well have been alone. He sat staring out of the window. The old soldier scowled at the intimate appearance of the three.

"He is not wanted?" the girl asked anxiously, her cheeks paling. "Not — yet?" she added fearfully, and her slave made haste to reassure her.

"Nay, nay, 'tis the fat one, I am sent to seek." Madeline sighed heavily, and Birnon came quickly to her side. "Ha, stranger, I hardly knew you. Name of a fish, but you look nearer the gentleman than I ever thought to see. 'Tis woman's hand that is necessary after all to smarten a man."

Sergeant Pere grinned slyly at the girl, who blushed rosily. Her fair fingers had stitched the seams of a lover's garments. The doctor's busy hands had placed a clean bandage over his mouth, and though his face was yet thin, gaunt even, from suffering and privation, he was clean to extremity. For his every feature had received attention from much needed soap and water at her hands.

"Monsieur Birnon will soon speak for himself," she said shyly. "His wound heal without a scar — at least, so Brother Alonzo says."

"For which you are without one doubt most thankful," came the chuckle. And she lost her smiling manner.

"If he were scarred beyond recognition, he would be the

same to me," she said with a touch of pride. And at the words, her lover's arm crept about a slender waist, his eyes lighting up with a thankful smile.

"Name of a fish, little one," Sergeant Pere laughed, "but you take me up sharply. Of course you would. You are not April weather, sun one day and snow the next. Of course not." Here he glanced anxiously at the shut door. "Thousand sweethearts, I forgot. De Celeron waits without. Phew! He sent me in search of the secretary. Where is he? Sleeping?" He grinned, glancing about the fast darkening room. But the two lovers only stared, shaking their heads in common, while Brother Alonzo roused himself to say —

"He passed without, by the window, some hours gone, good soldier. I wondered at his daring when I saw him leave the Fort."

"Leave the Fort?" gasped the old soldier. Then added hastily, "I thank your reverence." For with all his dislike of the doctor, his courteous, dignified manner impressed one whose life had been passed in camp. "I thank your reverence," he added in a more cordial tone. "I will return to my officer and acquaint him with the fat — I mean the secretary's absence."

"Scoff not at his weight, my good soldier," Brother Alonzo said with a gentle smile. "Were you to be burdened with such a body, the task would tire your activity. He is a kind soul, though at times over given to a leaning toward good food." And Sergeant Pere discovered to his intense surprise the art of blushing was not lost to him. To relieve his confusion, Madeline moved to his side.

"Ambrose is kindness itself," she said gently, giving his arm a little squeeze. "You will soon discover his whereabouts. He cannot have gone far."

"We will soon discover him," the old man said, recovering his wits. "Never fear, child, he is too fat to wander far." The last with a grin, as Brother Alonzo shook his head reprovingly. "I must to my Captain. He will fear I am gone too."

"Francis is to remain here?" Madeline asked anxiously.

"Certainly. Where else? I am his guard, and I do not purpose spending a night in the 'pit.'" With a loving smile she thanked him for his answer. Words at the moment were

beyond her reach, and he was quick to note her emotion. He, too, was thankful she recognized he was the man to protect a lover. On the spot he forgave the father for the sake of the daughter. Determined stronger than ever naught should come between happiness and her fair self if he lived to prevent such trouble. "I will see to him," he said gravely. Then a pounding began upon the panels and he ran from the room, coming face to face with an officer angry beyond description at his long waiting.

"What detained you?" he rasped out hotly. "Does the fool seek to hide from me?"

"He is not within there," the old man said hastily. "The doctor says he passed the gateway some hours gone."

"Passed the gateway?" repeated the other, surprised at the statement. "What would take him out there? Come," he added sharply, "it grows dark. We must search the shore and the forest. At once. Fall in as many men as may be spared. Tell them off to parties. Haste, fool. At what are you staring?"

Without another word he hurried from the room, pushing rudely past the trappers, waiting to be served. All scowled dislike at such treatment; but one had the courage to voice his resentment.

"He is like all the soldiers in this land," he muttered savagely. "We pay them gold for doing nothing, and they serve us as though 'twere easy got as dirt." And Sergeant Pere, following rapidly in the wake of his officer, paused for a moment to have his say.

"Name of a fish," he said grimly, "but you have much to say of us. I think 'twas yourself that came crying to me a week gone, of a Missassaga stealing your furs! Eh! Ah my brave Jules, I think 'twas you that feared to go after him to his tepee. I am sure 'twas you that promised me a silver fox skin for my bravery in restoring your pelts. Ah, the brave trapper, he pays us gold, does he? Well, I shall believe that when my skin comes home." And leaving the man to the mirth of his fellows, with a sneer he hastened from the room.

As he came near the entrance, he found Captain de Celeron busily questioning a shivering sentry. "Had you the intelligence of a fool, when you permitted such a man to wander forth unattended?" he was saying harshly. "Was he alone?" he

rapped out.

"Yes — my Captain," came the stammering answer, and a sigh of relief escaped the angry officer. For one moment — one stupid instant — thoughts of a secretary accompanying a prisoner to safety flashed through his mind. Then the sentry said slowly. "He wandered toward the shore, m'sieu. I saw him go that way." And Captain de Celeron smiled.

"Come," he said, shrugging slightly. "Command the men to search there. He may have fallen into the water —" Again he smiled, hoping his words would be proven true.

The sun was fast sinking to a red rest, when the search parties, fatigued with close scrutiny of the surrounding forest and the long length of beach, gave up their efforts, to stand together near the wide expanse of sullen blue-black water.

"What think you of his disappearance?" Captain de Celeron asked his sub, standing silent, a gloomy look on his scarred face.

"He is too fat to travel far," he answered slowly; "that is, when his feet serve to carry his body."

"Think you he went into the forest?"

"He would not dare venture there, my Captain; he is —" Here he hesitated, while the other laughed, as though enjoying a joke.

"You would say fear prevents him?" he said, twisting a mustache to needle ends. "That may be so, but possibly he desires to meditate on his sins. We will not disturb him." The last with a wicked smile. "Back to the Fort — we have done all we may." He whistled as he turned, but his sub shivered.

"The fat one gone," he muttered. "Gone! Where? I see a rope too near my stranger's neck." When the gateway was reached, he dismissed the men, calmly, with his usual precision of manner. Then a vindictive voice said at his ear —

"Sergeant Pere, at daybreak, your friend, the spy — hangs. You understand — swings at the end of a rope." And, as a flicker of dislike twisted his lips, "I see the execution displeases you, but such is my express command. Take warning, if the fellow escape 'tween now and sunrise, the rope that should have fitted his neck, tightens about yours."

Captain de Celeron smiled, turned on his heel to his quarters, humming a ditty as he moved. A love song, learned long

ago in that wonderful nest of palaces and slums — Paris. One having for theme the bliss of an unblessed attachment, with its accompaniment of sorry love. He was merry, almost elated, at the disappearance of the secretary. An opportunity hitherto undreamed of — an occasion to be speedily taken advantage of. Laughter widened his lips as he thought of the coming sunrise, whose pearl gray clouds should witness the struggles of a man swaying at the end of a long rope.

"She will soon forget him," he smiled; "then will come my turn." As he opened the door, "I wonder will she run to greet me? Or —" and the unended sentence caused a frown to crease his high white forehead. "Bah! she is like all women. She will soon forget."

Sergeant Pere saw to the barring of the gate. Watched his officer shut himself into his quarters. Then with a scowl he passed into the shadow of the stockade, out of the way of the sentry, to give himself up to thought.

"He would not dare harm her," he muttered. "Dare not!" he repeated as though to assure himself of the doubtful fact. "What shall I do now? What may I do? Shall I warn the three of them? Assist them to escape from his clutches? Curse him! May all the fiends of the bottomless place seize such a man as he is." Then he fell to cursing his own folly for raving like a fool when he needed all the wisdom at command to think and think exceeding clear. "Can I do it?" he asked himself, pacing aimlessly up and down the soft sand. "Can I, a soldier of New France — aye and of Old France for that matter — wait to swing like a dog? 'Tis for her alone. Just her. Shall I tell them to go — save lover and father — and hang?"

Halting a moment, he stared at a cloudless sky, whose gleaming stars mocked his appeal with glittering silence. Thoughts of the man who had saved his life, the girl who was dear to his fond old heart, the father whose first offense in a long friendship was that he had asked other advice, swept over his mind. His maid! He groaned as he thought on what he must do to save her misery.

"'Tis for her sake," he said. "Just her. I must do it. I must to them at once. Tell them that I will follow. Will see them — when?" he asked himself solemnly, and the swaying rope, the funeral tapping, came to mind. And again he

groaned dreadfully. He was so alone. None would see him pass out to his long rest. "I might have known the youngster would have his way. And they will not know. They will not know." And as he moved out to the light of the lantern, his swinging arms betraying the agitation of a mind distressed, the sentry stared. He thought the sober sergeant had imbibed too freely, so wild his appearance as he walked.

And Sergeant Pere at the moment was near demented. Ancient in years, he feared as all men do at times the approach of death. Sought by every honorable means to evade that soothing touch, smoothing from world-scarred foreheads the seams of suffering and of strife. The end — an honorable exit from life amid the farewell of friends, hard to calmly contemplate. Shameful death, the hangman's knot, disgraceful indeed to the mind of a soldier facing the grim pursuer of all men on many a well fought field without one single tremor, or the quickening of a heart beat.

A shudder raced up his spine at thought of the rope. Again he appealed to the mocking stars, twinkling their gleams of splendor on a soldier fighting the lone battle of his long life. A struggle, all alone! A battle fought to a calm conclusion for the sake of a maid. A sacrifice, offered on the altar of unselfish love for one who would never know. If she ever became aware of the offering, to perhaps forget in the happiness of wedded bliss. That one lay down his life for a friend is the highest form of abnegation known to man. Even then, some compensation is afforded to the sufferer, inasmuch that memory makes the deed well nigh immortal. But with Sergeant Pere the case was sadly different. He was utterly alone. He must allow none to know of his purpose or his object would be defeated.

"I must do it," he said bravely. "I must. I should be coward indeed did I bring grief to her, my little maid." And as the resolution firmly rooted its resolve in mind, his eyes filled with tears at thought of parting. But his troubled soul grew calm. With even steps and slow, he walked toward the storehouse, to warn the three that not a moment was to be lost. "She will be happy. I — must be."

As he reached the doorway, while his fingers rested on the latch, a loud outcrying came to his ears. A loud succession of swift knocks, followed by a repeated pitiful outcry, reached him

as he waited. And ere he entered, he paused to make quite sure. Then he stood and shook with laughter. Laughed till the tears streamed down his cheeks. Laughed, and yet laughed again with relief. For the fearful moanings frightening the silence of the night, the imploring voice raised in dreadful clamor for admittance to shelter, came from the lips of Secretary Ambrose, the man whose presence would save a spy from swift approaching death.

"One would think he was pursued by a legion of the lost," the old man gasped as soon as he recovered breath. "He is indeed in deadly fear of whatever pursues him. I will to him." And he ran across the stockade, coming to the gateway, on which two hands beat madly for admittance for their owner.

"Soldiers. Ho! Within, I say!" came the terrified scream. "Soldiers! Admit me! Oh! I am pursued by wild beasts. I perish!"

Such an agonized howl escaped the lips of the man outside that Sergeant Pere, somewhat alarmed, hurriedly opened the gate. In a moment the fat one rushed within, tripped, to fall headlong in the dust; a tumble that jarred his clerkly person to distraction. Helpless with merriment the old man strove to raise him, but the moment a hand touched his body Ambrose began again a most hideous clamor.

"Oh, I am undone," he wailed. "Ho, they have me. *Peccavi. Ora pro nobis.* The Saints have mercy, I am lost among beasts of Ephesus." Groveling in the dust, he gabbled the *De Profundis,* in a mixture of Latin and French; for though he wrote a most clerkly hand, his claim to scholar was not enforced by great wealth of learning. "Oh, Saints have mercy," he ended with a dismal groan. And Sergeant Pere anxiously bending over feared the man was badly injured.

"Monsieur Secretary," he said gently, "are you wounded? I pray you to cease groaning. 'Tis but a friend. You are safe."

Slowly, with many efforts, Ambrose scrambled to his feet. Leaning on the other, he said piteously, "Is the wild beast that attacked me driven off?" Then, at the grin on the face he gazed at, becoming conscious he cut but a sorry figure, he added with some attempt at dignity, "I am preserved from a grievous danger, my good soldier. Grievous harm, indeed."

The alarm in the Fort had become general. The soldiers

roused from slumber swarmed in a circle about the two. The flaring torches carried in their hands dispelled the darkness, and to some extent reassured Ambrose. Then suddenly Captain de Celeron thrust his way through the men.

"What means this commotion at such an hour?" he demanded harshly; as his eye caught the trembling secretary, who stood gulping down something in his throat that had never passed his lips. "Was it for *your* return this yelling, as though all the fiends in the pit found release?" And his angry glance, his contemptuous expression roused the secretary to answer:

"I would have you understand, Captain de Celeron, that I, a servant of His Reverence the Abbe Picquet, have but this instant escaped the hand of death. A wild beast — a furious animal of the forest, with horns and hoofs of awful appearance, pursued me even to the gateway of this place."

A loud guffaw broke in on the rounded periods of the secretary's address. The sentry appeared bent double with some painful throe. Captain de Celeron, observing the man, shouted loudly, "Guard, saw you aught of this animal? Are there Indians — wolves about?" And the soldier in a clear voice responded loud for all to hear.

"No, my Captain," he said, trying to restrain his merriment. "No, 'twas but the cow of mademoiselle following his honor to the gate."

Captain de Celeron tried hard to stifle the laughter rising to his lips. In spite of determined efforts, the laugh would come, joined in by all the soldiers to a man. Ambrose, staring stupidly from one convulsed laugher to another — even Sergeant Pere was laughing loud as the others — could scarcely believe his ears. That a poor innocent cow should have been the cause of his coward crying exceeding painful to one of his attempted dignity of manner. His face colored a fiery red; indeed he was on the point of bursting into tears, when the soldiers hurriedly made way for a girl.

"Shame! Shame, indeed on you all," she cried, her features coloring with resentment. "To laugh at one poor clerk is brave work for soldiers." Turning to Ambrose, she added solicitously, "Come, Monsieur Secretary, these men mean no harm. They are but rude, rough, uneducated boors who know no feeling." And with the fat man she passed through a silent

circle, not one daring to meet her flashing eyes, or even resenting the stinging sarcasm falling from her red lips.

As for Sergeant Pere, he had swiftly stepped back into the darkness the moment he became aware of her approach. "Name of ten million fishes, but I am lucky," he said with grinning face. "'Twas well for me she did not observe my handsome features. Did she so much as think I quivered an eyelash at his distress, she would tell me her opinion, and I suspect its friendliness." He shrugged silently, but did not once think on what she might have said, had she known of his brave determination to save her lover. "She is wonderful," he muttered. "Wonderful!"

Captain de Celeron waited until the slim figure with the unwieldy body faded from sight. Then he said angrily, "How came this disorder? On whose shoulders lies the blame?"

The soldiers disappeared as by magic, leaving their Sergeant to face displeasure alone. "On mine, my Captain," he answered, saluting sharply.

"Dieskau fashioned good men," the other sneered, and Sergeant Pere again saluted, flushing red.

"Had he had me at such disadvantage, I should be soon thinking cold iron poor comfort for arms and legs," he said quickly. "Of a certainty he would have jailed me for breach of discipline, if for naught else. I apologize, my Captain, as I will to the secretary when next I meet him."

"See that you do so at the first opportunity," came the sharp reply. "The Abbe Picquet might prove severe as the man you prate of did he come to know of this night's work." For a second the young man hesitated. Then he rapped out curtly, "The execution is delayed." And strode off savaging his nether lip to bloody lather. Suddenly coming to a halt beneath the dim lantern of the arched way.

Sergeant Pere followed the movements with a sigh. His keen eyes noted with some regret his officer appeared worn and thin. Something had aged the man. Heavy lines scored their deep furrows at each corner of his mouth. His eyes, set back in two discolored circles of dark flesh, gleamed a baleful misery from such hollows. Impulsively he followed. Touched his officer almost timidly on the arm. "I trust you are not ill, my Captain?" he said, and the pity in his voice caused the other to start.

"Ill! Ill," he answered shortly. "Ill." The last with some hesitation, followed by, very swiftly, "Nay, I am not ill," passing a hand across his forehead, "that is — not in body; my mind, Sergeant — my mind — thousand devils, what am I saying?" he ended harshly, and strode away.

He scarcely knew just what he did say. His mind yet weak from the effects of a stunning blow; his body not recovered strength from an enforced period of semi-starvation during the six-day siege when but weak broth had passed his lips. He desired counsel, but not of a grizzled sub-officer. Priestly advice, out of the question. His ardent desire to end a man's life, his passion to possess a girl, caused a madness to seize his brain, even yet unbalanced from a blow delivered by the father of the girl he had in cold blood determined to bring to infamy. Now, as he staggered over the dusty space, disappointment, desire, revenge directed at two persons, a clerk and a spy, jumbled together in wild disorder, filled his mind. Stepping over the threshold of his lodging, he banged to the door, throwing his body into a chair as though exhausted.

Sergeant Pere, watching the staggering footsteps of his commander, pursed his lips in a soundless whistle of perplexity. "Name of a fish," he muttered slowly, "but he takes disappointment hard. 'Tis bad for youngsters, these lonely places. I trust he gets not to my rum bottle. He has acquired a taste for strongwater of late. Drink is the father of all devils, and when a man seeks consolation of the bottle —'tis bad. Loneliness, with but rum for company, is bad. Bad!"

Doubtfully he walked to the storehouse, where necessity compelled a lodging for the night now that Ambrose, with his officer, occupied his own snug quarters, and ascended the wooden steps. He turned for one last glance at the lighted window of his room. Saw a dim shadow outlined on the horn panes, of a figure raising something to thirsty lips. With a scowl wrinkling his shaggy eyebrows, he ran down the steps, across the stockade, to beat at the door of his quarters with both hands.

"Who is there?" demanded a harsh voice. For answer he continued pounding on the wood, until, muttering curses, Captain de Celeron appeared.

"Well!" he asked abruptly, and the other became aware that harsh measures would have to be employed. "Well!" he said

again, and his sub tried to smile.

"I came for clothes, my Captain. Come to gain them ere you sleep."

"Sleep!" echoed the young man with a mad laugh. "Sleep — ah,— well, get what you require and begone."

Sergeant Pere quickly entered. With a quick glance to see he could make no mistake, he marked the position of the bottle standing on the table. As he passed, his hand — raised to the salute — swept bottle and silver mug crashing to the floor. His foot kicked viciously the falling glass against the log wall, where, shattered to a hundred fragments, a shower of tinkling pieces fell noisily to the boards.

"You fool — you clumsy blockhead," shouted Captain de Celeron, half raising his hand as if to strike. "Fool!" he repeated, staring at the trickling stream crawling like a blood-stain at his feet.

"Your pardon, my Captain," came the serene reply. And he understood.

"Was that done of a purpose?" he demanded harshly. "Answer me, hound."

With not a muscle of his features moving to express resentment at the vile epithet, his eyes steady as the North Star, the old man answered very slowly, and his words burned deep. "Captain de Celeron," he said, "I have known much trouble to come of the contents of a bottle — not so long ago, that you may afford to forget."

Suddenly the other leaped forward. In a voice thick with rage, he shouted: "Go — go, ere I forget myself. Out of my sight, I say, or —" Then he flung himself into a chair, covering his face with two shaking hands.

"Name of a fish," the old man muttered, once he was outside with the door shut, "but he is mad. Mad of loneliness and love. Wine and women, the one to the head, the other to the heart. One at a time too much for any man — together, hell for the best that breathed."

All night long he crouched under the window, through whose horn panes he every now and then cast anxious glances. But no change could he see in the disconsolate attitude of the crouching officer. Not until the morning gun roared its welcome to a September sun did either of the two leave their respective positions.

At the noisy summons to toil, Captain de Celeron suddenly rose and came to the window, coming face to face with his unprepared guardian. "There are many fools in this world," he sneered. "You and I, a brave pair among them." And the other, thinking his commander had recovered from his fit of passion, grimly smiled.

"My Captain," he said slowly, "this world is a world of fools, as you say truly. Some are fools for danger's sake — those are ornamented; others for love — those suffer; others again through loneliness — those die; and we — you and I, my Captain, are fools because we be soldiers, who sell our lives to a King we have never seen, for a day's pay, that is ofttimes never paid."

Captain de Celeron sneered at the raillery. "A philosopher was lost in you," he said briefly. "I see a band of trappers have arrived. Requisition their services in the name of New France. The guardhouse must be built. See they be fed by McLeod. I will be with you shortly." And he turned to the careful shaving of himself, almost inclined to resent the familiarity of his sub, yet recognizing the good intention toward his undeserving self. "Work is what I need," he muttered. "I will leave rum and brooding where they belong. The first in its bottle, the other to fools who know no better."

Whistling, he strode out in search of breakfast. Thoughts of a prison soon to be completed, whose strong walls would hold a spy until he stood looking his last on earth, made him exceeding merry.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW CORPORAL PECHE ESSAYED THE RÔLE OF HISTORIAN

FOR many days the even current of life bore off the slow hours to join the passed yesterdays, and to the casual observer at Fort Toronto everything on the surface of that stream was smooth as an uneventful June day. Ambrose lay groaning in the storehouse, comfortably lodged — it is true he ate little, which was something of a surprise to his host — but Francis Birnon occupied with Madeline, smiling and merry, was not openly sorry. McLeod resumed his duties at the bustling counter, saturnine, but more at ease, while Sergeant Pere, busy from morn to night, made up for his lack of cheerfulness by numberless witty sallies directed at the lovers, whose privacy he intruded on by untimely appearances. Brother Alonzo appeared satisfied to remain where he was, after a long conversation with Captain de Celeron, who stated brusquely, but politely, his absolute inability to furnish an escort.

"Well, young gentleman," the spare doctor said quietly, "I cannot depart alone. If my master, the Abbe, is incommoded by my stay — you of course will furnish satisfactory proof to him my detention here was unavoidable." Which answer gave the commandant of Fort Toronto some food for thought, and inclined him to hurry the re-building of the burnt guardhouse, that the laborers might be released to furnish an escort.

"His master needs his dosing, he would have me think," he muttered as he walked to the walls one morning. "In my own opinion he is like to live much the longer without such attentions. He must be gotten away, though — that fat pig as well. Both may see too much. Once they are out of this place,— then —" And he smiled.

To his eyes, the stockade presented a busy appearance. The band of trappers he had pressed into service — men who swung an ax as readily as they packed a load of pelts — were squaring

logs for the building that should rise on the ashes of the destroyed guardhouse. Wabacommegat, with a number of his young braves, squatted at the entrance. Thinking to advance the work in hand, he speedily induced the chief to allow them to assist. Promises of trinkets and food to each overcame their dislike to labor. But what was more to the purpose with the old man, a plentiful supply of strongwater was to be his for duties faithfully performed. To the young men the work, to his parched throat the liquor. With that alluring incentive Wabacommegat proved a hard task-master. He had, when he liked to display the power, a great capacity for driving others to the extreme of exertion.

One other figure was careful to meet the eye of the young commander. Corporal Peche, in the absence of Sergeant Pere — detailed to inspect the encampment of the Missassagas — was everywhere at once. His sturdy squat body multiplied itself, when his Captain glanced in his direction. At other times he was not so strenuous. Just at this moment, stripped to his shirt, his crafty countenance the picture of contented authority, in a voice, modeled on the crisp commands of his senior non-com, he bellowed orders right and left. For though he hated Sergeant Pere with right good will, desired to step into his shoes at the first opportunity, he secretly admired the military swagger of the old soldier. Always imitated his every action, when he from any cause happened to be absent from duty.

Captain de Celeron, leaning against the stockade wall, quietly watched Peche. He knew the secret enmity existing between the Sergeant and the Corporal; was also aware the latter was most anxious to cultivate his own good graces. What the cause of the trouble was he did not care. The Sergeant was a better man than the other in every way, and in the bottom of his heart he disliked the one who curried favors.

"Peche," he called, and with alacrity was obeyed. "Where is Sergeant Pere?"

"'Tis the usual day for inspection. Is he needed? The men work well without him, my Captain. He talks too much of his German Dieskau. I could,—" He hesitated, raising his shifty eyes for a glance to see how his superior received the insinuation.

"You could, no doubt, do much better without him at any time."

Peche flushed at the sneer. "I too was with Dieskau —" he muttered, "but —"

"You liked not his discipline? Left his service, or was forced to leave? Which?"

"He ordered me to the lash," blurted the Corporal. A ferocious scowl, flickering his features for a moment, died away so quickly that his officer fancied he must have been mistaken at the passion of the other, who ended calmly, "He ordered me to the lash."

"So the record states, my man. Theft, and the pillage of a mission. The sentence, two hundred lashes. 'Twas a wonder you survived punishment," Captain de Celeron said with a laugh, and the chest of the soldier heaved convulsively with thought of remembered wrongs. In his rage he muttered something that caused his young officer to come closer.

"'Twas the fat beast who lies within there," he mumbled, such a passion of hate in his glance, the other shuddered. "The fat brute Ambrose," he added, savaging his lips until a red drop trickled down his shaven chin, to hide in the recesses of a hairy chest.

Captain de Celeron stared. Here was a tool ready to hand, he thought. But what could a corporal have in common with a clerk? Was the man making up some lie? How should a thieving secretary go free, and the soldier robber be punished? Perhaps the history, invented or truthful, might be of service! But caution must be used. Sharp tools had been known to cut the hand of the user, unskilled in their keen use. With a frown to conceal his interest, he asked slowly —"You seem to harbor resentment against this good man? Think he is your enemy? Why?"

Peche, the sweat streaming down his tanned cheeks, seemed greatly agitated. For a few moments he remained silent, then with a gulp answered, "The sentence was just, my Captain. I forgot; but when I think of him —" And the cloak of military concealment dropped from his shoulders for a bare second; under the agitation of a mind possessed of a sense of great wrong, he glared his hatred.

"You admit you were justly punished, then?" the young man asked with a smile. He guessed beneath a smooth ex-

terior lurked the fires of bitter hatred, ready at the first safe opportunity to blaze out and consume the object of their deadly resentment. "You admit the sentence just, but what has the secretary of His Reverence the Abbe Picquet to do with such a thrashing?"

The Corporal hung his head. Wetting his lips he answered, "My Captain, you shall know. They said 'twas just. 'Twas the word of a clerk against a soldier, tried by other clerks. What chance had I for justice?" The last in a most bitter voice. "A few jewels disappeared from the place where they lay—"

"While a mission blazed, eh? You were a most precious scoundrel, Peche. Sacrilege and theft! A doubly damned crime. Man, I wonder they did not flay you alive."

"There were others, my Captain," came the eager reply. "Had the fat beast who tempted me but closed his eyes — remained silent — I should have escaped. 'Twas through him I was caught. He howled, bellowed — much as he did the other night — held on to me, until officers chanced by, and —"

"You suffered like the fool you were," the officer sneered, goading Peche to his tale. "And he escaped. He is much braver than I thought."

"He was willing to —" The Corporal stammered, ceasing suddenly. Perhaps he said too much! The two might be friends! His eyes sought the ground, but he instinctively knew a searching gaze enveloped his body from head to heel.

"He was willing what to do? Proceed. What deviltry did you suggest that would tempt so fearful a man from the path of safety? Answer! But stay — follow me. I would hear your tale. I like well to know what manner of company I am forced to keep."

Captain de Celeron strode haughtily to the platform; the Corporal, dog-like, at his heels. Inwardly elated, the latter moved, his footsteps soundless, his crafty features an index of a craftier mind. Confidences exchanged between superior and inferior officers sometimes led to promotion of the latter, he thought. If secrecy should follow trust! Then how far might the trusted one rise? To Corporal Peche, the coming interview was a first step to Sergeant Pere deposed, with Peche reigning in his coveted stead.

"Now," said Captain de Celeron sternly, his back to the wall,

from whose height he could keep one eye on the working parties, one on his follower, "I know you for a thief, my man — brave, too, I think; but — should you prove liar as well as rogue —" He shrugged, and Peche, eager, hurried to reply.

"All I say may be proved by writing," he said quickly.

"That record, many days' journey from this outpost, as you are well aware, and perhaps seek to take advantage of. Now to the tale, I say. The tale and be brief. I have scant time to waste on vagabonds."

Peche scowled, licked his lips, coughed, to clear his throat, then plunged into his narrative with headlong rapidity. "When my company lay at Three Rivers, we were some three months' pay in arrears, our clothes in rags, our provisions, moldy biscuits with rainwater to wash them down to starving stomachs. The men fled to the forest daily, in company with squaws —"

"You lag behind, Peche," came the drawling interruption. "Others have been before you in relating the history of New France. And what has that to do with the secretary? Deal with him — I am not here to play scholar to you. Proceed to the matter of Ambrose."

Peche respectfully saluted. "Your pardon, monsieur," he said, "but such relation is necessary that you may know I tell the truth. The reason of my —"

"Your sacrilege — well, out with it. I am waiting. I have the musty history of this country at my finger ends. To Ambrose, I say. At once." Captain de Celeron spoke angrily. He began to see animosity desired revenge. Thought the long drawn relation but the account of a repentant thief. One who by late confession sought to secure sympathy if not redress from a superior. "Haste, man," he said sharply. "I have no time for your private revenge." And once again Peche plunged into his tale. He could not afford to offend this young aristocrat, eager to hear his doubtful history.

"Then, my Captain," he commenced quickly, "we lay at Three Rivers. Badly paid, worse fed, we were forced to forage for ourselves. I was of the guard stationed at the Convent. There were four priests, with Ambrose, a clerk — or something of the kind — I know not exactly what, but he was there. He was desperately hungry. Near out of mind with starvation."

"I can understand his despair," was the interrupting sneer. And Peche, lifting his crafty eyes for a moment ventured a smile.

"He was indeed at his wits' end," he said, blinking rapidly. "One day I was on guard. He conversed with me. Spoke of much money, easy to be come at, with which to buy food. Hinted of rich jewels in a place where determined men might remove them without suspicion. He offered to lose the keys of such treasure would I share the loot with him, and I at last, overpersuaded, much against my better judgment, consented." He paused for breath, while the listener sneered disbelief.

"Your judgment was not proof against money, I fear, and perhaps 'twas something the other way about. I doubt very strongly, Ambrose possessed courage to plan robbery without your counsel. An he did, he is braver than I thought."

"He was a smooth devil in those days, m'sieu," Peche answered with a growl. "When I knew 'twas a church, I drew back. For many days he pressed me. One day showed me how easy the theft. I was hungry. The sight of so many jewels maddened me, overcame my scruples. I was tempted, fell. The keys were lost, I found them, and taking into confidence another of my company — fool that I was —"

"There would have been more for one than three, Peche?" Captain de Celeron asked with sarcasm. "Enough for one, but no more. I understand. You would have added murder to sacrilege. You are a precious scoundrel to wear the uniform of New France."

The Corporal scowled. He had intended at the time to become sole owner of the treasure. How — well he was not at confession. His one desire to implicate Ambrose the question of the moment. A man to whom he considered he owed two hundred lashes, whose lasting sting he ached to pay in kind. He started, coughed, then plunged into his story with renewed speed. So fast he spoke, that his hearer was forced to bid him repeat many muttered and well-nigh unintelligible sentences.

"The jewels came into my hands," he said. "Ambrose was to watch. He did, but someone overheard our plans, or, what was more likely, the fat brute to save his own skin betrayed me. The jewels were within my coat. I ran, fell into

the arms of four soldiers. Then Ambrose yelled, howled, bellowed, until officers came. I was arrested. He pretended to have assisted me, that he might catch me in the very act. That was his story at the trial. The other soldier was put to the rack. I was spared that torture."

Peche paused, his eyes gleaming red, his passion so violent he choked. Captain de Celeron almost began to believe. No man, he thought, could simulate such eagerness to be revenged. "How came this Ambrose secretary to His Reverence the Abbe Picquet?" he asked.

"He was excused on the ground that he repented," Peche growled. "He fled to the forest — that is later, when the mission burned. Then one day he came to La Presentation, besought the Abbe to receive him, so I understand. No doubt he explained away well enough the circumstances. He always was a shuffling rogue."

"You were both a pair of scoundrels," came the harsh comment. "You think you have good cause against your clever confederate?"

"Cause enough to hate him both body and soul. Were I given opportunity to revenge his treachery, greedily would I seize it. I waited on him the other night. He did not know me — but I knew him. 'Twas all I could do to keep my knife from seeking his heart." And the sweat standing out in tiny drops on his forehead intimated to his interested listener the exceeding narrow escape of Ambrose.

"Were you confronted with him, what proof have you?"

"Proof! I need none. I have many things to remind him of my features. One thing, he might remember the brother he betrayed to save his own fat carcass."

Captain de Celeron started as though stung by some venomous reptile. "Brother!" he exclaimed. "Brother, this clerk — this secretary."

"Ambrose and I are born of one mother — our father — well, who shall swear to that?" And he grinned hatefully, while his companion gasped at such brazen expression.

"You are indeed an arrant blackguard to so befoul a parent," he said at last. "A beast," he added under his breath, while Peche curled his thin lip in a vicious smile.

"We were hung in a basket at the Foundling Hospice," he said. "The Jesuits educated both. Ambrose was a fool,

could not learn. I served a lengthy term — was to take the vows — as a matter of fact I did, but —" here he hung his head —" a woman proved too much for me."

"You! A priest?" exclaimed the amazed officer. "A priest!" Then the superior manner of the man, a breeding he had often silently wondered at, was explained. He stared for many seconds, ere Peche began again.

"They unfrocked me for my sins," he said. "I deserved that, but not the lashes. That suffering I owe to my brother, a fat beast who deserved a share. I never was fitted for priest. Holy Church was right. I deserved her punishment."

He spoke so earnestly the other came close to stare into a pair of shifty eyes, raised from the ground, to confront steadily the starer. "Have you lied to me regarding the secretary?" he asked sternly.

"Take me to him, my Captain. You shall judge for yourself."

Captain de Celeron turned, to gaze out over the smiling lake. He knew the truth was spoken at the moment, however far the speaker might ordinarily separate himself from that virtue. Yet, he could scarce believe his ears. Though he knew from experience all sorts and conditions of reprobates were to be found serving in the ranks of New France. But that this harsh-faced, evil-disposed scoundrel who vilified a mother without scruple, who was prepared to murder a brother, were a safe opportunity of escape discovered, that he had ever resided within the sanctity of Holy Church, been one of Her honored servants, near past belief of the most credulously inclined.

He turned suddenly with, "You a priest?" and Peche nodded in gloomy manner.

"Yes, my Captain, more shame to me, that I did not continue fit for so high office," he said, stumbling over his words, to add eagerly, "Many confessions have I heard from lips long closed, to ears as securely sealed, as though they too were lifeless. Scoundrel, as you call me, I would not dare break the oath of the seal of confession." And he almost whispered the latter end of his sentence.

Again the other stood amazed. Astonished at such strange composition of vice and virtue. "You are an unhung scoundrel," he said, after a long silence, and Peche saluted as though the title was an honor. "'Twas you that robbed a Missassaga

woman of her child, I think. Demanded ten beaver skins for its return."

"The woman lied," came the sullen mutter. "She defamed me because I would not marry her."

"That will do," the young officer said abruptly. Though the man had contributed some welcome information, he discovered a sickening sense of nausea attack his stomach at the near contact of such a degraded wretch. "That will do," he added contemptuously. "You have kept silence so long, see that secrecy does not become burdensome. I may have need of you — later. There may be a vacancy." And Peche grinned, well pleased.

"How came you to serve New France?" he heard asked in a voice that hesitated, ashamed of curiosity.

"I had a wife, my Captain," he stammered, the grin gone. "I have her yet, for aught I know to the contrary. She was too good for me." Here he passed a grimy hand across his forehead as if seeking to erase remembrance, continuing in a shaking voice: "Too good for me. We had a boy. I let her go without a word for his sake. Joined the ranks for the bounty granted to soldiers serving a continuous term of ten years. I should have received three hundred francs some three years gone. My time was up. But they robbed me. Robbed me, my Captain, after ten long weary years. That money, that should have gone to him — my little son, they stole from him to make restitution for a father's theft. He is dead — now."

He clasped his hands as he ended, his eyes glaring red. And his auditor gasped. What next he thought? Sentiment in a moral cesspool! Wonder of wonders. Affection alive in a heart desiring to cut short a relation's life. Here was a problem in man too hard to solve at one reading. Villainy of any kind offering reward would buy him body and soul, yet a few words administered by another mortal would seal his lips to secrecy forever.

"That will do," the young man said sternly. "Drive the work forward," and with that abruptly turned away. He had heard enough revolting confession to last him for a lifetime. He shuddered as he slowly walked across the stockade.

Peche left to himself quickly recovered his usual surly manner. Exultation was prominent in his mind. Possibly he might succeed his hated sergeant. He had good cause to hate,

he thought. When he had received a public flogging, a willing hand wielded the stinging lash. Sergeant Pere — not sergeant then, but a common soldier in the ranks — had spared none of the weight of a most heavy hand on the back of a doubly damned criminal, convicted of sacrilege and theft. Perhaps the well-deserved lashes had been laid on more in the interests of the military arm of the service, whose devotees suffered worse than the Church, by the destruction of a mission. Creature comforts were supplied to soldiers at such places by the kind priests. Attention given to painful wounds at their ready hands, and Sergeant Pere in his younger days was devoted to his company. They would be losers by a burnt mission, and New France lose also by lack of their well being. For the old man in those earlier days had loved his country. The regard now somewhat soiled by lack of appreciation, and his slight rank as sergeant of foot, detailed for outpost duty with a handful of raw recruits, who were in appearance and training the extreme opposite of the smart veterans in whose ranks he once numbered a unit.

But Peche was cursed with a good memory. He burned to repay every single smarting blow. For years he had seen no way to come at vengeance. But he nursed desire in hope of one day accomplishing revenge. The moment had come, he thought gleefully. He would work! Name of Heaven, how he would work to secure an officer's appreciation. That day he sweated himself, and every man under his command. Toiling strenuously, sparing none, not even his own lazy bones, he accomplished more than the much talked of Sergeant Pere, his ancient enemy had ever done. For revenge is a stimulant to exertion, unequaled even by ambition, to support a man to a much-desired end.

Captain de Celeron, pacing the sand at the extreme end of the stockade, turned over in mind how he could best use his information. He was more than disgusted at the relator, but the relation might assist his passion. Try how he would, he could not forget a fair face whose every feature roused maddening desire. "She shall be mine," he muttered. "The moment those two old women have departed, I will to her at once. The lean one will go readily, the other — I will see what he has to say. When he knows of a long lost brother he too may come to my side. He is villain enough for any crime. I will

prove Peche at once." Almost running, he hurried across the sandy inclosure, mounted the steps of the storehouse and disappeared within.

Had he and his corporal but cast an eye down outside the points behind whose shelter a tale had been told, they would have observed one crouching, paralyzed with astonishment. Even after the pair moved off he remained, his scarred features working with an inward emotion hard to name. "'Twas well I passed this way," he muttered. "Name of a fish, but was there ever such a pair of beauties? De Celeron is damned beyond doubt, if he consort with such a rogue as Peche. And I nursed him! Phut! if I had known what he was like to turn out, I would have found a stray bullet and thrown it at his back. As for the other." Here a sour smile came to his lips; a snarl escaped them angrily. "Name of a fish, but I will put him through a sea of trouble, ere he reach my stripes, the cur." Suddenly he recovered his wits. A plan came to his mind. And he ran to enter the Fort. "Thousand devils," he snarled, "I lashed him nigh to death once. The next occasion I will skin him alive and tan his filthy hide to a rope that shall hang his carcass high as yonder oak." He carefully avoided observation as he entered the gateway. If such a thing could be said of so brave a soldier, he actually sneaked his way round to the back door of the storehouse, so eager he was to escape notice of his young commander.

When that gentleman entered the gloomy trading room, he was waylaid by Brother Alonzo, who with a gracious smile at once commenced to speak of the necessity of his immediate departure. "I trust the difficulty of my escort will be a thing of the past? I observe many men about the Fort." And the young man, impatient though he was to at once interview a secretary, composed himself to pay attention to the needs of a lean doctor.

"I may not spare soldiers, reverend sir," he said, "but an escort of trusty Indians I think may be furnished." And the benevolent priest smiled his pleasure.

"That is well," he replied. "Ambrose will remain for a short while. He is indisposed — has not recovered from his fright of the past week. He is to interview the prisoner, I understand. I trust the poor young man will not be dealt with too harshly?"

"He is a spy," jerked out the other shortly. "He must suffer the penalty for that offense."

"Of course he has been examined? Permitted to write an explanation of his presence here."

"He is a most contumacious dog, your reverence. He is English —"

"But a brave lad for even that unfortunate occurrence," was the gentle interruption. "Would it not be as well to wait? I may plead with my master — possibly he may see fit to change his hasty mind. I think the young maid would grieve sorely should aught happen to her — well, we call him — her very dear friend."

Captain de Celeron jumped to his feet, wrath blazing in his eyes. His lips tightly clenched to prevent language hardly fitting the ears of reverend men. "The ancient fool," he thought. "Is he in league against me? He cannot depart too soon. I will provide him an escort, one that will be in no hurry to arrive with their passenger, that is — if they ever do." Aloud he replied calmly, "Mademoiselle McLeod would surely hesitate ere she reposed confidence in a complete stranger, an enemy of her country, a spy." And suddenly Brother Alonzo, immersed in science, experienced a touch of doubt as to the wisdom of his departure. He was not a reader of men like his master, but the flushed face, the twitching features of his companion, aroused a sensation of uneasiness in his gentle, unsuspicious mind.

"My son," he said slowly, "haste goes with youth, age walks more at ease. But surely, young though you be, it has come to your knowledge that women are ignorant of nationality when love blinds their willing eyes. Mademoiselle McLeod, I assure you — if you will pretend ignorance of her affair — loves this young man. This — of course, in confidence."

Captain de Celeron discovered immediate desire of vengeance choke his free speech. Thickly he muttered, "The fellow is a spy — he will be soon forgotten by a loyal lady of New France." And again the spare doctor smiled very gently.

"My dear son," he said softly, "you have my sympathy." Then with a touch of authority, he said distinctly, "I trust you will not allow personal inclination to interfere with duty. My master, the Abbe, was a trifle hasty in his decision. I repeat this with due respect. He had much to worry him. But

I beg you to remember his order, that Ambrose hold some speech with this poor fellow you term spy who, I am sure, deserves a better fate than you propose for his body."

Captain de Celeron went first red, then white with suppressed rage. For a moment he hesitated. Bowing low, in a most sarcastic manner, he said, "I have your master's command to execute this fellow —"

"You have, young sir," Brother Alonzo interrupted calmly. "You have, but you also have my caution not to be too hasty, and also my master's command that his secretary take plenty of time to discover aught the prisoner may know of the British movements. I do not think myself he is aware of what one of their soldiers is doing. But that is beside the question. He is a fine young fellow, that I do know. Now, enough of such unpleasant matters. I understand you will do only as duty suggests, and the honor of a French gentleman will be quick to obey. Again, when may I depart?"

The young man savaged his lips until red drops tasted salt to his palate. Mastering emotion, he answered with a smile, "When you will, reverend sir." And again the doctor had doubts.

"Ah," he said, "then I will acquaint the maid. She will no doubt have many preparations to make for so difficult a journey."

"A journey! Mademoiselle McLeod," stammered the other. "Do I understand aright? Does the lady think to go with you, revered sir?"

"That is the reason soldiers would be best for the escort. 'Tis tempting Providence to send Indians with a white woman."

Captain de Celeron staggered back a pace, his face pale with discomfiture. "Think, I beseech you," he said rapidly. "Pause ere you burden yourself with a woman on such a venture. The Iroquois, the English, are everywhere abroad. I say the lady shall not undertake this madness." Such a proposition was indeed a setback to half-formed plans. He scattered the sweat from a damp forehead, while the doctor stared at his emotion.

The learned man began to understand the meaning of many puzzles placed for his unraveling. Ambrose had not been backward in voicing an extreme dislike of so autocratic an officer. Also a very rude treatment had received lengthy ex-

planation. Such statements had received smiling toleration from a man immersed in science. Now the priest, the observant student of human nature, suddenly came to the surface to be somewhat alarmed for the safety of those he was forced to leave behind.

"You seem distressed, young sir," he said mildly. "The departure of the lady displeases you?"

"I confess to being shaken by such news," the other began, wiping his face hurriedly. "But of course, now the danger is known to you, she will remain. And besides, I, as military commander here, absolute — forbid so dangerous a journey."

"You will hardly forbid my going, young sir?"

"You must do as best pleases you, reverend sir," the other said smoothly. He began to see a way out of his difficulty. "You are beyond my control. Mademoiselle is named on the roster of Fort Toronto. I, as officer commanding, responsible for her safety. Of course, I cannot permit her to incur danger."

"I understand," came the quiet answer. "You seek to detain the lady at your side. But I warn you, even military authority cannot, and shall not in this case, override the command of a parent."

Captain de Celeron began to see his desire fast fading from sight. For a moment he stood silent. Then he said gravely, "Reverend sir, you as priest must recognize that military care for the subject is higher than all parental authority within New France. You must know that."

The spare doctor frowned. Such obstinacy was new to him. He was about to voice his anger, declare the girl should immediately go with him, when a soft touch fell on his arm, and he turned to come face to face with the object of his anxiety. "Ah, my daughter," he said pleasantly. "Are you prepared? I am informed an escort is shortly to be placed at my disposal."

"I thank you," she said quietly, "but departure at present is out of the question." And the young man smiled, but the doctor asked anxiously, though he knew his answer —

"Why, my child? Why?"

"My father, first; the two wounded ones, secondly; the —" here she blushed rosily, continuing hastily, "I could not leave Rose of the Hills without a woman's care."

Brother Alonzo frowned. In his heart he admitted the

necessity, but dreaded the danger to her he had grown to love. "You are brave, my daughter," he said, in a shaking voice. "Very brave."

"I fail to see why," she answered with a merry laugh. "I have lived for years in safety here. My father has always protected me. Sergeant Pere, since he came, has been more than kind. With these two I fear nothing. Why should I?"

The doctor had no answer to such arguments. He was so busily engaged observing the features of the girl he feared to leave behind, that the brief shadow of resentment, flickering the features of Captain de Celeron when his name had been passed over without mention, escaped observation. But whatever the cause of his emotion, his voice was exceeding smooth as with a low bow he spoke.

"Mademoiselle is wise in my poor opinion," he said quietly. And Brother Alonzo discovered the sin of unreasoning dislike harbored a place within his kind old breast. "There is some danger here of course, but much more without the shelter of the walls, I have the honor to command."

"That may be," came the acid answer, conveying much meaning to one listener, "but I suspect a danger within that more than equals that without." And the young man flushed red as the sunrise before a storm. He knew his companion understood his motive.

"I trust your reverence comes safely to the end of your journey," he said respectfully. "I will immediately see to the escort." He turned, walking jauntily off. The girl stayed, and that was the principal thing. All he cared for at the moment. "Priests!" he sneered. "Men in petticoats who fear pleasure. Fools, rather, who may not pleasure themselves and would deny enjoyment to others. Fools!" And he whistled as he moved. Thoughts of the near future were sweet indeed.

The moment his back was out of sight, Madeline said anxiously, "You will not go. What will the two wounded ones do without your attention?" And the old man smiled.

"Witch," he said, "would you tempt me from duty? Good nursing, a woman's care, are better than all the drugs in this wide world. Hum! Yes! Hippocrates himself, were he here, dare not deny that statement."

"The prisoner — Francis — he will sorely miss you, rev-

erend sir."

"He will, my child. He will." Then anxiously, "You love him? Ah! I see for myself. Well, a word of caution to you. Beware this young officer; he, too, would solace himself with your charms. I like not his open anxiety to have you remain."

"I know he professes attachment toward me," the girl said bravely. "My father is also aware of the fact. But no harm may come to me, while two such men as Norman McLeod and Sergeant Pere remain alive."

"I trust not, my child, but I think 'twere better that you come with me."

"I will not leave my father," came the proud reply. "He is all I have."

"I wish that were a truth, child," came the anxious interjection. "Do you forget the man in prison?" And the priest was startled by the gasping of a girl, gone white to the lips.

"He will not be harmed?" she whispered. "He is not a spy. You must know that. You have authority here. Can save him — if you will."

"My authority is naught, child. I have but this moment spoken of him, to the Captain of this place. Cautioned him to proceed slowly, where the young man is concerned. But he will have none of my counsel. I must speak to Ambrose. Warn him of how matters stand. That much I may do, nothing more at present. When I reach my master, the Abbe, I will plead with him for your sake. More I cannot do. Be brave, my daughter. I must prepare." He moved off, muttering a prayer, the tears very near his kindly eyes. He foresaw much sorrow lying in the road that a slender pair of feet must tread, and being after all a man, he pitied the woman.

Madeline watched his figure disappear. Then she sank to the top step, absolutely powerless to stand. During the last few days of intimate communion with a lover under the safe protection of a kindly priest and doctor, she had near forgotten the shadow of death brooding close over that loved one's head. The last words of the priest roused a sudden fear in her heart. An aching bosom suddenly became conscious of what existence would mean robbed of the presence of Francis Birnon. "I must save him," she moaned. "Ambrose must protect him. There is naught on earth too dear for sacrifice, if he go free."

Then she rose, hurriedly crossed the busy storehouse, to knock sharply on the door behind whose closed panels lay a man, himself in fear of death, by reason of a torturing pang at his left side. A body pain resulting from excitement caused by mundane fear, of a common, ordinary, everyday cow.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOW A PRIEST DEPARTED FROM FORT TORONTO, AND WHY A STOREKEEPER DETERMINED TO FOLLOW

SERGEANT PERE, creeping round to the back of the storehouse, avoiding observant eyes, came to a window thrown wide to admit the vagrom breezes of a warm September day. Cautiously he peeped within the room, venturing a warning "hist!" to Ambrose stretched full length on the skin couch. Several times did he repeat his signal, until the secretary with a stare of alarm roused his rotund weight and came slowly to the casement.

"What is it, good soldier?" he asked. "I am ill — some other occasion best befits your visit." But the old soldier hurriedly clambered in, seized a fat arm, to the owner's great and visible alarm.

"I bring you news," he whispered. "Bad news. Are you alone? I must see you for five minutes. Ere Captain de Celeron come. I must," he added sharply, and again the secretary stared.

"What is it causes you act in so strange a manner?" he gasped, excitement causing his chest to heave. "What is it? I am ill — not recovered from a — a grievous sickness."

"Were you at Three Rivers?" came the unexpected question, and a frown chased across fat features as another rapid query followed the first. "While the mission burned?"

Ambrose gasped. For a moment he appeared about to run but a firm grasp detained his attempt, and thinking flight to be useless, answered somewhat indignantly, "I was — I was — but why this sudden anxiety to know of my former whereabouts?" Pointing to his cassock, "I like not undue familiarity, my good man." And the other released his hold, permitting the shaking, fat figure to totter to a welcome couch.

Sergeant Pere waited while Ambrose mopped his face with a large clean cloth. Then he came close. Whispered slowly, "I will explain, Monsieur Secretary, or rather, I will — an

you will listen — relate some news I overheard. It concerns you — You!"

Ambrose, with distended eyeballs, groaned. Commenced to relate in dolorous tones of inhumanity, practiced upon a sick man. But his companion, a mountain of troubles on his own head, the fear of a sudden intrusion constantly in mind, waived the mumbled sentences away. His face taking on such serious aspect that Ambrose involuntarily paused in the middle of his groanings. "I am not — not in condition to hear you, my good soldier," he said. "I am far from well. Brother Alonzo warns me of excitement. I am nervous, unstrung, I —"

"You had best compose your wits. You are like to need them," came the dry rejoinder.

After an interval given up to a continuous muttering, the secretary stammered painfully — and even Sergeant Pere discerned his groanings had some cause —"I will — if — if I must, but I pray you be brief — brief."

"Then, Monsieur Secretary, I overheard a tale intended for other ears. A tale of sacrilege and theft related by a soldier of this place — one — I pray you compose yourself — one seeking to do you grievous bodily harm." The other stared wide-eyed, and the relater of confidential utterances almost believed that confidence a lie. Then the thought his companion pretended ignorance flashed across his hardened brain. Without further hesitation he said harshly, "Did you assist at the robbery and burning of a mission?"

Ambrose started to his feet, intense indignation portrayed on every feature. "Soldier," he answered, "you seek to insult me. Go! I will not bandy words with such as you." And once again doubt of Peche filled the mind of Pere.

"'Tis well to deny such horrid crime," he said slowly, for he had no remembrance of such a clerk at Three Rivers, "but at least hear my tale. The man may but have added one more spot to his filthy soul. I know him for a liar. At least hear me, I mean no harm — come but to warn you of what may happen, and you unprepared."

Ambrose gasped. Stared, as though he thought his companion mad. "You speak in riddles," he stammered painfully. "Danger here! To me? At whose hands?" Then he shook his head wearily, sinking its heavy weight on a pair

of shaking arms.

"The one telling the history I know well to be an arrant scoundrel," Sergeant Pere replied quickly. "The man who listened — though he is my superior officer — over ready to believe; but for all that, they mean you harm. They do," he repeated seriously, as the other gasped. "Listen — you shall judge for yourself. The tale is short, and there is little time to waste."

With a cautious listening at the door to assure himself none overheard, he tersely stated his news. As the words fell from his lips, he watched with keen eyes every expression on the face of a man who betrayed fear, remorse, anger, by turns. As he came to that part of the narrative where a corporal claimed relationship with a clerk, spoke of their mother, Ambrose uttered a fearful groan.

"'Tis true," he muttered hoarsely. "Too true, if he be what he says he is. True he was a priest — attempted robbery of the mission he guarded. True, indeed, I listened to his tempter's voice, only to dissuade him from an unholy crime. The Abbe knows all — he knows. I confessed. Received absolution at his hands, was forgiven, and made his trusted secretary. Soldier," he added passionately, "I am but mortal. I have sinned, but have striven to repent." Then he gasped, suddenly fell forward on the floor, sprawling grotesquely; a mountain of fleshly agony.

The old soldier attempted to restore his body to the couch but was unable to accomplish the kindly intent. Suddenly the door of the room opened, closed silently, and Brother Alonzo appeared, his lean features frowning as he crossed the floor to make a hasty medical examination. "I warned him," he muttered. "He has a trouble of the heart, good soldier. Serious trouble," he added gravely. Then motioned for assistance to place the senseless man in a comfortable position.

"Had I known, I would have taken more care," Sergeant Pere commenced hurriedly. Active as he was in wounding his enemy on the field of battle, he knew little how to treat such wounds when not on the surface of the bodies he wounded. "Had I known," he repeated seriously, "I would have been more cautious. I but came to warn him of a danger — had little time to choose words."

"I overheard," the doctor answered. "'Tis a wretched

tale of misdoing, and I fear the poor fellow will pay heavily for his share in the matter. I knew of it," he added in reply to a surprised stare. "Oh, yes, the Abbe confided in me many months past. Now, find the maid. I must instruct her as to treatment. There is little to be done, save quiet and good nursing — should he revive."

The door again quietly opened, and a girl entered white-faced, breathless, speechless with amazement at the scene. Sergeant Pere ran to her side, bolted the door, then whispered to her of the sudden illness of the man she came to seek.

For a moment womanly weakness held her silent. Utter helplessness rushed in, a stormy sea, overpowering movement. Thoughts that the only man in the world standing between life and death of a loved one — was helpless, near death himself — caused her to sway as though faint. The doctor was quick to note the agitation of her mind. In an abrupt manner, sharp spoken, he said almost angrily —

"'Tis no time for weakness, silly one. If you would save the life of a man you profess to love, render some assistance. Some strong spirit. Quick! Procure a quantity, at once."

Bravely conquering the swimming nausea of a disordered mind, Madeline hurried from the room, and Sergeant Pere permitted a smile to rise to grim lips. "Reverend sir," he said, "'twas in the nick of time, such anger." And the other shook his head.

"I was not angered, good soldier," he replied quickly, bending over his patient. "I have observed that all women are best without sympathy in time of danger to those they love. Had I pitied her — there would have been another sick one to care for, and I have enough on hand as 'tis."

Madeline entered, composed, but white as snow, with a bottle containing rum. For several silent minutes, the doctor was too busily occupied, forcing open the lips of the secretary, to pay her the slightest attention. After he had succeeded in making his patient swallow a few tiny drops, his lean fingers searched for a pulse, that had well nigh ceased its troubled beating. When a faint movement came to his touch, he spoke, his tone grave, as one who fears much but tries to hide an evident fact.

"Slow — exceeding slow and weak," he said. "He will come to, but he must be careful. One other such attack —"

He ended with a quick glance at the two, allowing them to complete the sentence for themselves.

"He will die?" Madeline asked in a whisper. "And Francis?"

"All men are born but to that end, my daughter," he said kindly. "But your sweetheart is safe for the moment. My master's orders were that his secretary should interview a prisoner, and while he lives not a man shall interfere."

Madeline fell on her knees, while the glittering drops trickled between shaking fingers. She began to see the intervening of a most wonderful God; through one man's illness came safety for another, and that man might recover. Her lover escape death until a doctor could reason with an autocratic, hasty, but always kindly disposed authority.

"You will not depart now, reverend sir?" she asked, swiftly rising.

The benevolent priest smiled, but shook his head. "I must," he said. "My master needs my services, even more than his stricken secretary. He journeys toward the seat of battle — may need me, besides," with a sweet smile, "how will that prisoner fare, do I remain? I will leave with you instructions for the care of three sick ones, and I think you will find few moments for tears."

"I will try to be brave," the girl said quickly. "Nay, I will be. I am ashamed of weeping. Time alone will tell if happiness is to be mine with one I love. I dare not waste the moments in bemoaning a present when the future is yet to be known. Your blessing, father."

Brother Alonzo raised both arms to a full extent. In a voice that wavered slightly with emotion, he implored aid from that One, never far from the afflicted and sore distressed. And Sergeant Pere, silent for once, turned hastily away, coughing, to hide the tears in eyes that would water, despite their owner's dry soul. "Name of a fish," he muttered, "but he will have me preacher in place of soldier, does he stay much the longer." And there was no faintest trace of envy in his voice. To his intense surprise, he discovered a sense of unworthiness spring up in a self-complacent breast, as on his ears fell the kindly tones of a priest he almost disliked for coming between an old soldier and his little maid. Seriously he began to think the other much the better man of the two.

Then Madeline came to his side with Brother Alonzo, whose hand she grasped, and they three moved to the window. Each silent, each lost in thought, one fearing for a lover, the other two for a maid.

The ringing strokes of keen axes fell on their ears, accompanied by loud shouts of sturdy men wielding gleaming steel. The drone of a few belated summer insects filled the air; a pine-scented breeze stirred the leaves of the adjacent forest to dreams of a flown season of delight. In the distance, soothing melody of soft waters breaking on a sandy shore added music to a peaceful harmonious scene. Trouble, at the moment, seemed leagues distant from Fort Toronto.

A deep sigh escaped the lips of the girl, immediately noted by her companions. The lean form of the doctor bent close, as he asked anxiously, "Have you thought better on staying? 'Tis not too late. I will do my best to insure safety, hazardous though such journey be."

"I could not leave, reverend sir," she answered quietly. "I should be unhappy away. I trust to you — know that when you come to His Reverence the Abbe you will plead for the life of the man I love. I must remain here, try to be content. Nay," she added with determined air, "I will be so. With my father and Sergeant Pere for protection what harm may come?" Then she smiled affectionately on the old soldier at her side, who returned her glance with such ardent passion in his bleared old eyes, the doctor found difficulty in repressing a smile.

"Were this good sergeant, say, some twenty years the younger," he said somewhat dryly, "the lover might hold some jealousy 'gainst his ardor." And the old man, flushing a violent red, vainly endeavoring to repress a touch of bitterness in his voice, answered very slow:

"Reverence," he said, mastering the desire to overwhelm the other with an avalanche of sarcasm, "I am an old dog. One grown thin in the service of the King of France. He will not miss the affection I bear this maid. 'Tis true I love her. Why not? I am not ashamed of that fact. And were I as you say, some twenty years the younger, I might not make so bold, that is in public — in private — well it may not be and that ends it. As 'tis, my age brings compensation. I speak before the world. Am satisfied with my position — an

elderly lover — who would cheerfully lay down the last years of a wasted life to save her little finger harm."

The girl turned swiftly to kiss him on the lips. Deep in her heart she knew — and what woman does not, who is truly loved — the strength and purity of the flame burning in the bosom of her slave. And she silently acknowledged to herself that had he been even ten years the younger of his seventy odd full summers and lean winters, Francis Birnon, young and handsome as he was, might have discovered a husband seated securely on the throne of wifely affection. His youthful passion arrived too late, for the wife of an old soldier to honorably acknowledge.

"If Sergeant Pere were younger," she said at last, to cover a most embarrassing silence, "you would not so plainly observe our love for each other."

The doctor was quick to note the anger of his male companion. Offering an outstretched hand, he said eagerly, "Good Sergeant, I pray pardon for a most untimely jest. I am much older than you. With all my apparent skill in medicine, I could not hope to rival your wisdom and learning in the art of warfare. I trust to be forgiven," he added anxiously. And the other, tickled by open admittance of his ability, which was exactly what the spare man desired, returned with some reluctance a most hearty hand-grip.

"Reverence," he replied, a wintry smile melting glacial features to some warmth, "two ancients may not differ, where a mutual object of affection is concerned. I perceive we both hold some fondness for this saucy tease. Let us forget vain words." Then, as if wishing to change the subject, "When do you think to leave us?" And the doctor knew he was not wholly forgiven. With a heavy sigh, he answered slowly —

"To-day. I have tarried overlong as 'tis. Captain de Celeron is even now occupied with preparations for my going. I leave at once." And as his companion smiled a deep satisfaction, he was about to speak further of those left behind, that even now it would be best that the girl accompany him, a low moan fell on his ears.

Ambrose, gasping on the couch, had evidently overheard. "Leave me not here," he panted. "Brother, I implore you, do not leave me to the mercy of a most desperate man." Then he fell back on the couch, the tears streaming down pasty-

white cheeks, and Madeline experienced a sense of dislike directed at such apparent, glaring cowardice.

Sergeant Pere moved to the window to hide his disgust. The doctor, better versed in the ways of man, walked over to the couch. Laying a gentle hand on the forehead of his patient, he said gravely, "Brother, you could not venture with me. Take heed to what I say, an you compose not your mind, you will set out on a much longer journey. One you must take alone; one from which there is no hope of return in the flesh. I have cautioned you before — be exceeding careful of what you do."

Suddenly the secretary scrambled to his feet, tottered across the floor. "I will go," he gasped. "I am ready — ready —" Then he fell heavily forward headlong, and Madeline, with her slave, both thought him dead.

"Quick! the spirit, my child," Brother Alonzo said, and as he hurriedly administered attention, while the minutes hastened on, a chill air stole into the room, as though Azrael hovered nigh to release an erring soul. "He breathes," he said with relief. "That is all. I could not do more, did I stay with him night and day. His irritable condition arises from the nature of the disease. Now, ere he recover and set eyes on me — which may cause another and more brief attack — I must be gone." As the girl shook her head in doubt, "All my skill and drugs could not lengthen his days, daughter. Quietness, rest, is his only hope. Those elements you may procure for him, as well as I — nay better, an you will. Farewell, my child. God's blessing on you — and you, good soldier, do you care to receive such at my unworthy hands? Farewell, I must to my master, and — I will not forget the young man."

"And the others, reverend sir?" she gasped, white to the lips.

"Follow the directions I gave you to-day. The Indian will be soon better, the maid — I doubt if she ever recovers good health. As for the prisoner —" Here Brother Alonzo hesitated. The eyes of the girl were swimming in tears. Dumb with grief, she could but mutely ask his earnest assistance. "Trust me, child, I will do all that a mere mortal may. And now to seek the officer who commands."

He hurried away, fearing to remain lest his determination

to depart should melt at the speechless appeal in the eyes of a maid he had grown to love. In his heart he had little hope of changing the decision of the Abbe. The British had always been a bunch of thorns in the side of that gentleman. The removal of one irritating prick, a stern necessity to the welfare of New France. And, perhaps, a slight recompense for the many reverses suffered by that august mistress.

Sergeant Pere followed close on the heels of the doctor. Madeline, left to herself, gave up her mind to thought the most gloomy. Then she fell on her knees to pray. Besought a merciful Creator for the recovery of the sick man, whose lengthened days would bring safety to a lover. Implored the Blessed Saints to intervene to spare a father, that he might enjoy a home with the man whose hours she desired to be given to her keeping, in a longed-for, happy wedded life.

How long she remained in silent communion with the Maker of all things earthly, her brain had no idea. The sinking sun reddened the western sky to a riot of gorgeous color. The sounds of labor had long ceased a not unmusical clamor. But the voices of the night winds sighing round the open casement came to disturb the current of troubled thought. Then, suddenly, silently, the door opened. With a half turn of her graceful head her soft glance fell on the figure of the man she prayed for. In one moment his arms received a clinging form.

"Francis! Francis!" she cried, holding him close as though to shelter his needy body. "Francis!" Just little half inarticulate murmurs of delight, and the sounds thrilled the young man to the core of his being.

Dumb he was, unable to soothe a passionate storm of weeping. Only by tender touches of one hand on a smooth forehead, the pressure of a strong arm about a slender waist, was he able to show his sympathy and his understanding of her need. And as they stood at the wide casement, in a flood of moonlight cast by a silver orb swinging high in a cloudless sky, those gentle caresses stilled the weeping, soothed the sorrow of a girl whose very life was bound up with the man who gave them.

"Dear one," she whispered softly, after a long pause, "Ambrose has been seized of a sudden sickness. The doctor says, he — he may die." As the young fellow nodded very gravely to show his understanding of the frail hold he had on

life. "You know your fate, if he does — does die?" And again a pressure followed, as the lover pointed upward. "Oh, yes, yes," she cried, "I know; but 'tis here on earth I need you. Here!" And again she fell to unrestrained sobbing, whispering, "You are so young, so young to die such dreadful death."

She clung the tighter to his ragged buckskin-covered shoulder, as if in fear the next jealous moment would seize a newfound treasure. And for many silent minutes — minutes that lengthened to hours — the two remained wrapped in an embrace of purest passion. Ambrose, the weakened link, forgotten for the time, though his life was the one weak binding, holding them together on earth.

Without the storehouse, Captain de Celeron had lost little time in obtaining a canoe, less in securing six trusty Missassagas to propel its birch shapeliness. He stood with the doctor, the storekeeper and his sub at the landing-place, his features smoothed to a sweet smile.

"You are determined to proceed, your reverence?" he asked courteously. And the patient Alonzo, could hardly restrain a frown.

"I am," he answered quickly. "And one word ere I leave, Captain de Celeron, Ambrose is ill — not in condition to be disturbed — not even to hurry the execution of your rival. And once for all, understand me," as the other bit his lip savagely; "I know your attention to mademoiselle is distasteful. Now I take this good storekeeper, and this Sergeant to witness my instructions, as spoken. Leave well alone." Then he turned to McLeod, asking information of the way he proposed to travel, and the young officer knew bitterness of thought.

"The cursed meddler," he muttered. "The fat one may do little harm. As for the storekeeper and that thin fool of mine, I will bring them both to heel or know the reason why not."

"Farewell, young sir," he heard a voice say at his elbow, and he bowed what he trusted to be a last adieu to the speaker. "Farewell, Monsieur Storekeeper, and you good soldier. Be careful of the maid." Then with a final grasping of hands the kind old doctor priest stepped into the frail craft, and as the paddles propelled him into the darkness, his voice floated back to shore, "Remember, my son, the arm of Holy Church is long,

and very, very sure." Then the blackness swallowed the voyagers in a ghost-like haze creeping up from shadow land.

Captain de Celeron turned suddenly on Sergeant Pere with, "Is it the custom for you to absent yourself without leave?"

"A man must do as he is ordered," came the respectful answer. "'Twas inspection day. You, as commander of this place, know well I ventured my neck in the leaving of the prisoner, when duty called."

"You are ready witted," snapped the young man; he had half forgotten his order that the spy be guarded. "Musty parchments, with a quill, would make of you a crafty lawyer." And his sub colored at the sneer directed toward a lack of learning.

"I but obey orders," he answered quietly. "I may not read, as you are aware, but my record is written for all the world to see, though 'tis true enough, I am unable to make out its spelling. I have little desire to be a scholar, my one hope to complete in the service of New France, a register of blameless conduct."

"See that you walk more carefully in the future, my man," rapped out the other. "Your conduct of late has been the reverse of satisfactory. Mark well what I say, or I will strip the rank you hold, place another in authority. To the Fort. In the morning take command of the working parties. I have other, more trusted men to guard a spy."

Without a word the old man moved off. The storekeeper received some of the hate his actions roused in the mind of a hasty undisciplined officer. "Remember the offense hanging over your head," he said. "I have not forgotten, though you seem to think so. The spy is in your care. Corporal Peche will assist in the storehouse until further orders. The two savages lying there will at break of day be dispatched to the encampment of their tribe. The secretary is ill, I am informed, see that your daughter wait on his wants and they only — you understand."

Abruptly he strode off, leaving McLeod to pace the silent sand, his mind filled with thought of immediate escape. Pondering what must be the end of present affairs; regretting Madeline had not gone with Brother Alonzo, to some measure of safety. Last of all, wondering if Fort Toronto would see the burial of his tired bones, and what would be the fate of a

daughter robbed of an only protector.

"I must to the old one," he muttered at last. "We must get together — plan some way of escape. 'Tis desertion for him, worse for me, the leaving here without orders. The Intendant will flay me alive, do I leave his stores to the mercy of the first raw trader taking my place. As for him, the old one, they will hang him higher than Haman." Then again he commenced his tramping. Suddenly he stood at the lake edge, flung both arms out wide. "Curse New France, the Intendant and this boy commander. I will go in spite of them all. This is my reward for years of faithful service."

The sudden determination soothed his mind; the spoken words relieved something of the tension at his heart. Sharply he turned, and as his sturdy form faded into the shadowed stockade walls, a figure rose from behind a pile of logs.

"What news for my little officer," he chuckled, lighting an evil smelling pipe, through whose rank stem he inhaled ranker fumes of tobacco. "Pere follows McLeod, Peche rises. What a chance for a corporal! I know baby face desires the girl, and once her father lies covered by a few feet of earth — well, the less said on that the better. She will say enough. This old fool, an he deserts, will suffer the tortures of the damned. I know him. Once he is out of the way, then I step in, and my officer may find enough to do in the handling of some fine men I know of. The girl! Ah, what a lucky dog you will be, Peche!"

Long and loud the man laughed, his eyes gleaming with the mere idea of what he might do in the future. His merriment, the snarl of a wolf, as he sat gloating. He, an unfrocked priest, a desperate though cowardly scoundrel, a would-be traitor to the man seeking to make a tool of his knowledge, was by no means the manner of soldier to neglect Satan-sent opportunities.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW A HALF DEAD INDIAN RACED WITH DEATH

EARLY the following morning Peche sought his commander's ear, eager to relate his eavesdropping of the night. His statements received with something of a sneering comment on the truthfulness of the informer. The abuse scored on the blackboard of a retentive memory to be repaid with interest later on.

"How may he escape? You watch him night and day. Sleep in his room, eat at his table, live with him, in fact, until the guardhouse be completed. You will of course take Sergeant Pere's quarters. How may he escape, I ask, unless with your connivance?"

"You set a hard task, my Captain, but I will do my best to serve you."

"See that you do so, if you desire to rise. Now, off to rouse the workmen." Abruptly the speaker turned, for the cringing Corporal sickened his soul, and moved toward the storehouse. As he crossed the stockade, Wabacommegat appeared. "Where is your son?" he asked sternly, and the features of his companion set hard in a scowl.

"The Chief of the Missassagas has no son," he said harshly, to hesitate at the frown of doubt twisting the face of his companion.

"There is strife between you? Why?" And the crafty savage, knowing he had stumbled, hastened to explain.

"Senascot has an evil tongue. He would stand in the moccasins of his father before his time."

"At the moment, he may hardly stand in his own. He lies within yonder house, where as you know, there is but one woman to wait on three sick ones. He must be removed to the tepees of your tribe." And the face of the father took on a most ferocious expression.

"If he be thrust from the shelter he has preserved, if the soldiers he has saved from death do not find him welcome —

how shall the father he seeks to betray, the tribe he has deserted, give him a place to rest?"

"I am at a loss to understand, Wabacommegat," came the suspicious answer. "The young man is a brave warrior. Did not he set out for Niagara, with one woman for company, while the Missassagas hid their cowardly carcasses until danger was past?"

"Let the dog die," muttered the Chief savagely, turning to conceal the hatred in his eyes. "Let him die. There is little room for him in the lodges of his tribe."

Captain de Celeron curiously watched the dirty figure stumbling across the sand. The callousness of a father to an only son astounded his civilized reasoning. He stood twisting his mustache until a thought shot into mind, and he almost raced up the steps into the storehouse.

"McLeod," he said to the storekeeper, busy displaying trade on a slab counter, against the coming of possible customers, "is Senascot sufficiently recovered to see me?"

"I will see, Captain de Celeron," came the chill response. McLeod hastened to the inner room, while the young man left to himself, walked to the open window, a scowl on his forehead revealing resentment of such reception.

"A surly dog," he muttered. "Escape, will he? I will show him. He had best be careful. If he offer such greeting to me again, I will find a way to deal with his long body. Escape! I will teach him a bitter lesson an he try that game."

The door opened quietly at his back, and McLeod with Francis Birnon appeared, carefully supporting the weak figure of Senascot. He frowned at the apparent intimacy of the three. Then swiftly came to their side of the room.

"Where was your father the night of the attack on this outpost?" he demanded sternly. And Senascot, started, would have fallen, had he not received the support of Birnon to a chair. "Where was he? I demand to know. Why does he refuse shelter to an only son?"

The young brave sat stolidly silent, his eyes cast down. At last, as though he found the answer after hard searching, he replied in a weak voice, but the echo of a once sturdy speech, "The father of Senascot is old. He at times is strange in manner." And Captain de Celeron became angry at the evasive answer.

Leaning close, he rasped out, "Was he abroad to assist the Iroquois?"

Senascot tried to rise as though the suggestion was an insult to an ally, but feeble limbs chained his body to the chair. Forced to remain seated, he averted troubled eyes from a steady stare insisting truth. "My father was abroad," he muttered thickly. "He was not present at the attempt on this place."

A statement absolutely true. The wily old man had kept his presence well in the background, while his braves, under directions previously given, and obeyed at the time to the letter, had stormed the tiny outpost of his friends and allies.

"Senascot is sure? Then the girl who lies within is a liar. Lied, when telling a tale of Missassagas on the warpath!" A silent nod was the only response, and Captain de Celeron frowned.

"I will to her at once," he said quickly, moving toward the inner room. But two thin hands clutched his coat, and in spite of efforts to release their hold, clutching fingers clung desperately to his torn uniform. "Release me, you lying dog," he shouted. "Let go, I say, ere I do you an injury." But Senascot retained his feeble grasp, and with a yell of rage, the young officer dashed clenched fists full into the face of the wounded man. "You, to dare lay hands on an officer of New France," he said, turning to run across the room.

As he passed, Francis Birnon, furious at scoundrelly behavior, raised one foot and tripped him full length upon the floor. Then unable to voice righteous anger, the dumb prisoner moved to the Indian, seeking to staunch the flow of blood streaming from bruised nostrils. The storekeeper stood petrified. While he waited, amazed, the door of the inner room flew wide and his daughter hurried to his side.

"What is it, father?" she gasped. "What is it?" As her eyes fell on the prostrate form, half stunned upon the boards, "Has Francis — is he injured?" she whispered. And the parent shook his head.

"No — no — dear, 'tis naught. To your room, at once," he replied, trying to urge her toward the open door. "In, in at once."

At the moment, Captain de Celeron stumbled to his feet. For a second, he waited, recovering his breath. Tugging

sword from scabbard he ran across the room, brandishing the steel within an inch of the prisoner's face. "Spy," he stuttered, "Spy. I will cut your carcass in inch pieces and throw them to the dogs of the Missassagas."

Francis Birnon coolly stood his ground, contempt glittering in eyes seeking to express the opinion of one unable to speak. And his sweetheart, fearing for his life, ran with extended arms, as though to protect him from assault, from a man near out of mind with passion.

"You are brave," she said angrily. "Exceeding brave to threaten an unarmed prisoner. You dare not harm him, while Monsieur Ambrose lives."

Without a word, perhaps somewhat ashamed, Captain de Celeron hurried to the stoop, shouting, "Peche! Peche! To me at once." With a crowd following on his speedy heels, the Corporal hurried to obey. "Bring irons. Haste, you slow-witted scoundrel," greeted his ears, and he turned, running in search of the furnishings he devoutly desired were to ornament the lean figure of his brother soldier.

The mob of trappers, shirt-sleeved, sweating, crowded together at the foot of the steps. Their curious faces betrayed desire to know further of happenings, causing an officer to shout commands with such slight regard to military decorum. But Captain de Celeron was far past the trifling observance of mere form. Rage swept his soul, blinding a distorted vision to the rude men who stared open mouthed at what they considered insane behavior.

He paced the boards with unsteady feet, the muscles of his red face twitching, more with thought that a girl had witnessed his humiliation than for the insult to an officer. That she should have been at hand — seen him full length on the floor — stung his soul to the quick. Then Peche appeared, dangling rusty handcuffs, and as the clink of metal met his ears, he said harshly, "Haste, you fool. Am I to be kept waiting all day?"

They entered, to discover a man holding a shivering girl within the compass of two strong arms, while a father vainly endeavored to soothe her wild alarm. And the sight caused Captain de Celeron a madness. "Seize him," he shouted. "Iron him." As the girl attempted to prevent Peche at his welcome task, "Stand aside, you, or I will take measure with

your person little to your liking."

She bravely faced his fury. With icy contempt, inflaming his rage the more, she said, "I would have you remember the words of Brother Alonzo, Captain de Celeron. As for your cruel treatment of a wounded man — one of the allies of New France, that shall be reported to your superior officers at Niagara, if I have breath to tell them."

"Out of the way, woman," he raved, thrusting her on one side. To Peche, "Iron him, fool." And as the ready Corporal flung a sinewy form on a yielding prisoner, locking the rusted irons about hands and ankles, "Into the 'pit' with him. There let him rot. If I may not stretch his neck, I will starve his body awhile. There were no orders against that course."

Again Madeline attempted intervention; thrust her slender figure between the two. But the Corporal, a grin wrinkling crafty lips, pushed roughly past, leading his charge outside, where exclamations of surprise greeted their appearance. Then Captain de Celeron, folding his arms, spoke with an evil sneer.

"Storekeeper, I heard of your desire to escape. I tell you plainly that until an officer of the Intendant come to relieve you, you remain. Now, dare disobey me — and I will throw you into the 'pit' to keep company with a rascally spy."

McLeod placed one arm about his daughter. Bravely returned a steady stare. In a voice, composed as his respectful manner, he said, "I refused to leave when his reverence, Brother Alonzo, spoke of departure. For myself —"

"If the spy could have passed out in your company, no doubt you would have been ready to run."

"Without one doubt, I should; but we will, with your kind permission, let that matter pass. I am here at my duty, and as a civil servant of long standing have something to say. You are military commandant —"

"And as such will be obeyed to the letter."

"Your absolute right to such obedience is unquestioned," McLeod answered respectfully, determined to give the other no further cause of offense, "I, as storekeeper, last to interfere with any order of yours."

"'Twould be but the once, so I warn you."

"I need no warning, Captain de Celeron. As I say, my duty I have done, and always will in the interest of New

France. But I have this much to state — in turn, give you a warning. To-day you laid rude hands on my daughter — permitted your man so to do without instant punishment following that insult. Such treatment, I will embody in my next report to the Intendant at Quebec. Doubtless, he will have something to say to an officer who may not command respect for women. Come, Madeline, this gentleman will excuse our further attendance." And he turned, as if to depart.

"I demand that you stay," came the haughty retort, and the storekeeper hesitated. Something in the sneering tone caused his features to turn ash-white. "You have an exceeding poor memory, Monsieur McLeod."

The girl uttered a shrill cry. She understood. Trembling in every limb, she exclaimed, "My father is sorry — he is indeed. He will ask your forgiveness."

The young man sneered. "I thought to bring one of you to some sense of my authority. Have no fear, mademoiselle, that is, for yourself. Your father forgets the trifling matter of a blow delivered to an officer on duty."

Again she bravely faced him. "Captain de Celeron," she said, striving to master cold terror, "I appeal to you as an officer and a gentleman. Do not visit your displeasure on my father because his daughter cannot return your love. You know I love another — one you term spy.— I beseech you, have mercy on him — on us, allow us to depart. See!" She fell on her knees, seizing cold fingers, with her warm hands. "I kneel to you — I, a woman who never had cause to bend to any, save a merciful God."

Captain de Celeron was visibly affected. His face flushed, with envy of the passion inspiring her. Then hate of her lover came raging. This spy, who had come to take a place that would without doubt have been his in a near future. How he hated him! The clasp of clinging fingers changed the current of his thought. With a glance of love, he appeared to almost relent. "Mademoiselle," he whispered, "you ask too much. I cannot see you go. I love you as dearly as you think to love this — fellow." Then he suddenly lifted her to her feet. Passionately exclaimed, "Give him up. Promise to be mine, and I swear on the honor of an officer and gentleman to save his life."

"That is without your power," a weak voice said. And

the three turned to gaze on Ambrose, grasping the doorposts to prevent a headlong fall. "That is not within your power, young sir," he repeated, and the girl flew to his side.

"I beg of you — be careful," she implored. "Be cautious in your movements." And the fat one smiled.

"Aye, maiden," he replied, "'tis well I am reminded. If I die?" A shudder rippled his frame. "If I die, then follows one who is dear to you, and I would avoid that mischance." He tottered to a chair, the girl supporting his portly weight. "Ah, now young sir, go, and go at once. I have overheard much this day. Too much. Have heard an officer of New France implored for a protection he will give — only at a price. Have heard a weak girl teach a lesson of courage to a weaker man, and I have heard a young man threaten a father with death. Death — death. Now, go, sir. At once. You are an evil man whose wretched associate — my more than wretched brother — you see, I know all — seeks to rob me of the short span of life remaining to my short years."

Captain de Celeron stood silent. Turned sharply on his heel. He had not dreamed the fat one possessed so much of courage. He had no desire to unnecessarily offend him. He was a servant of the all powerful Abbe, and as such, must command a certain amount of respect. Though he cursed the meddler in his heart, he intended going to wait a more propitious occasion. Doubtless would have instantly gone, but the storekeeper chanced a smile of pity. That expression interpreted, a sign of triumph at a momentary defeat.

With a gesture of rage, he snarled, "You smile, McLeod. Have a care. Have a care, lest your precious daughter come not crawling to my feet, imploring a ring I offered but a moment gone. And you, if you dare so much as lift an eyelash to thwart my will, all the priestly authority in this land shall not save you. So, remember."

McLeod flushed crimson, but bit his lip to prevent reply. His tormentor, at his silence, threw discretion to the winds. Shouted in loud tones, frightening the girl to the point of fainting.

"Aye, my seller of worthless trinkets, and bargainer of rotten goods, take heed — take heed lest your daughter become not a worthless bargain, too stale even, for marriage with

a drunken dog Missassaga."

He was permitted to say no more. The storekeeper, maddened beyond endurance at the vile insult, sprang at his throat, and the two went down together in a mad struggle of desperate hate. Ambrose strove to rise. But excitement proved too much for an already overtaxed strength. His head fell forward, and again he departed to the land of unconsciousness.

The girl stood, dazed for a moment. Then alarm found a voice, and she ran screaming from the room. Her cries attracting the attention of the laborers, who for the second time that eventful day streamed over the sand like dogs after the hunt. The room was instantly filled with a swaying mob, each man striving to come near the two fighting madly on the floor.

Sergeant Pere pushed through. "Stand back," he shouted. "Stand back, idiots." Grappling with the maddened combatants, "McLeod! McLeod! are you mad? Let go, I say. Let go his throat. Would you send the man to Kingdom Come? Name of a fish, what a madman!"

Seizing his crony by the back of the neck, he shook the burly body with such force that to attack this new antagonist became a necessity. And the storekeeper loosed his hold. Staggering to his feet, panting, well-nigh breathless, he gazed about with bloodshot eyes, until his daughter, coming to his side, with little frightened cries brought remembrance.

"Name of the devil, McLeod, but you have murdered him sure enough this time," Sergeant Pere said, kneeling, to unbutton the heavy stock collar. Then as a limp head fell forward, "You, Peche, assist me to carry him outside." Then they bore off the senseless form to the well in the stockade, while Madeline clung to her father. He, shaken to his soul.

More than a few splashes of water were required to produce effect. After repeated drenchings, and the liberal applications of much brandy, the young man opened his eyes, his fingers feeling for a white throat whose skin would show the marks of a well-deserved choking, for many a day. The figure of a girl, her hair loosed to the breezes of the lake, caught his eye, attracted his instant attention. Hoarsely he whispered, "Seize me McLeod. Throw him to the 'pit.'" And Peche, taking to himself the command, hurried off.

Sergeant Pere attempted to follow, but a weak voice called

him back. He stood, irresolute, with a brain alarmed for what he felt quite sure was now to happen. Then he motioned for assistance in bearing an unconscious man to his own quarters. Endeavored to rouse his officer by repeated applications from a well-filled bottle of rum, kept secretly for emergencies.

"Name of a fish," he muttered, "but the storekeeper has made one step too far on the long road to silence this day." Through the window he could see the storehouse without being seen. "Peche!" he snarled; "Peche, ever to the front, when there is dirty work on foot. And I had best heed my speech, or I am like to take second place in a hurry." He saw the storekeeper standing on the stoop, his hands behind his back. Madeline, clasped slender arms about his neck, endeavoring to prevent the Corporal from leading off her father. "Name of the devil," he muttered savagely, "but what a caldron of fat is boiling this moment."

Captain de Celeron opened his eyes, endeavoring to rise. "Assist me," he whispered. "Give me an arm. Where is this madman? I will show him who is master now." And the old man shuddered.

Together they crossed the stockade, escorted by the crowd. As the steps were reached and Peche with his prisoner passed, the young man whispered wickedly, "How now, my would-be murderer? Who commands at this outpost? The 'pit' will clear your brain, for of a surety you must have been mad to attack me." But the storekeeper answered never a word. With a glance of contempt, he strode along, and in a few minutes the dull thud of wood on wood spoke of one more confined within the cramped quarters of the prison at Fort Toronto.

Peche, ever ready, hurriedly returned to assist his officer to the silent storehouse. They entered to find a girl and Indian, anxiously tending a clerk. "Throw that fellow out," Captain de Celeron commanded harshly, pointing to the young brave. But Senascot, with a haughty gesture, moved with feeble steps toward the door, and Sergeant Pere scowled open dislike of such treatment.

"He is near dead," he said suddenly.

"As you will be, do you dare interfere with my orders," came the harsh whisper. To the girl, alarmed, he said, "To your lodging, woman. I will deal with you later — when the voice your scoundrelly father robbed me of returns." As

she tottered away, "Peche, see that you remain here. Permit none to have communication with her, unless by my written order." And a devoted slave became aware of extreme helplessness to assist a worshiped mistress. The meshes of an adverse fate seemed tightening about his willing arms. Dazed, he heard the brutal whisper of a man he had sought to fashion to a gentlemanly soldier say, "Now — ah, now." Then, "Carry that carrion to the inner room. 'Twill not be long ere he be carried feet foremost in another direction." He heard the laugh of his Corporal, found himself staggering beneath the weight of a fat form, senseless, limp to the touch. "Now, Peche, you command here. As for you, Sergeant Pere, to your duty. One whisper from your lips, and into the 'pit' you follow, and doubtless you will be in a much desired company."

The old man recovered from his trance to salute sharply. Moved off, a blank stare in his bleared eyes. His brain alarmed for the safety of his little cabbage, alone, with a half-crazed man; the secretary near dead, if not dead at the moment; himself denied access to both — a father and lover with a creaking gallows ready to greet their innocent necks. And he groaned. The thoughts chasing their dreadful way through his own near-falling head inspired hideous fears for the safety of one lone woman.

"Name of God," he muttered, "what shall I do? If I venture after the priest, I may not reach him in time. If I stay?" And he broke into a passion of cursing directed at an officer. Suddenly an idea entered the chaos of his mind. A desperate plan, depending for success on the efforts of an Indian, near too weak to walk. "Senascot, he must go. He shall go. To-night — no — this day. At the hour of noon I will find him out. He shall go, or —" Then he stumbled to the stockade.

The long hours of a weary forenoon crept slowly along; each minute an age of waiting to one who would have flung the precious hours he could ill spare behind with lavish hand. At last — when noon crawled to a fulfillment, he instantly hurried to the gateway. Passed through, with a careless remark to the sentry, of his desire to gather berries as dessert. Strolled slowly, with eyes alert to catch a first glimpse of the man he sought.

Under the trees, at the western end of the clearing, a bundle lay in the shade. All his strength of mind was needed to prevent two anxious feet from breaking into a race. But he moved cautiously; stooped, to touch the sleeper on the shoulder. "Senascot," he said, as the other opened his eyes, "have you strength for a journey? The young man who saved your life is in danger — great danger. His woman, too." And as the young brave nodded, "Then set out to find the doctor-priest. He who tended your wounds. He seeks a master at Ticonderoga — you will go? Thank the Blessed Saints. All I have is yours do you succeed." He slid into the forest. Under the leafy shade raced to the beach: ran the faster along the pebbled shore under cover of the overhanging bank, coming to the wooden jetty, where lay moored several birch-bark canoes.

"This one will serve," he muttered, after examining several. "There be deer meat in this. 'Tis a speedy craft." Unloosing the mooring rope, he paddled swiftly down the lake, close inshore, to avoid observation of peering eyes. "In," he said to Senascot, waiting ready. "Here is bread and meat of a kind. Water you have in plenty. Now, haste, haste, if haste end your life. Remember, you go for the sake of a man who saved your woman from the Iroquois."

With a nod of understanding, the young brave thrust off, dipping his paddle silently, and the birch-bark glided away eastward. Sergeant Pere stood watching, until craft and voyager were a mere speck upon the vast flat-bosomed lake. Then, he turned. Made a silent journey to duty, not forgetting amid the turmoil of an anxious mind, to remark to the sentry, his search for fruit had been unsuccessful.

That night, at sundown, when the rounds were made, a report reached the ears of Captain de Celeron that a valuable canoe had disappeared. Search parties instantly organized to trace out and capture a daring thief. But the offender, undisturbed and unsuspected — for he was conspicuously active — later sought a hard bed to wait. And at the return of the last belated searcher, he rose to admit him and bar the gate.

"Name of a fish," he muttered, "but I am near to howling like a babe for its bottle. I outwitted the stern one — I may succeed with this boy I trained — or rather sought so to do with his beast mind. If I do —" With this uncompleted re-

"Now, haste, haste, if haste end your life"

flection, the elderly thief sought his bed, leaving fate to her web. And as he slept his dreams were tinted with beautiful coloring. The work of that Divine master, whose name is Hope.

CHAPTER XXVI

A WEAK MAN DEFENDS A YET WEAKER WOMAN

MADELINE McLEOD, in her father's lodging, with the burden of two helpless invalids thrust on her care and attention, moved as one in a dream, from whose nightmare horrors there seemed slight chance of escape for the dreamer. The violent attack of her father on his officer had happened with such speed, as to well nigh paralyze both thought and movement. His arrest and imprisonment stunned a brain dulled by grief. Had it not been that an Indian maid and a man near death claimed her attention, in some manner distracting anxious thought from her own very close danger, the knowledge that she, a lone woman, was at the mercy of a most unscrupulous man would have driven her gentle mind to the verge of madness.

The comforting thought remained, Sergeant Pere was there — free to render assistance. The racking dread, ever present — he might not be permitted to come to her aid. The hoarse whisper of an angry man, commanding that none be admitted without his written order, had reached her ears, while she leaned for support against a closed door.

For one brief mad moment the idea of rushing to the old soldier, claiming his protection, flashed to mind. Then, the fact of his commander's evident hostility, the certainty that swift punishment would descend on his old body, did he dare the slightest interference on her behalf checked anxious footsteps. White and breathless she tottered to a chair, and sat staring on the set features of Ambrose, whose breathing sounded stertorous, loud in the silence. That, his only sign of life. Otherwise, he might well have passed for a figure in wax. So quiet he lay — so still his body — she ventured a trembling hand on the black cassock covering a broad chest. Suddenly, a low moan coming from the inner room roused her. With a shiver of fear, she hurried to the side of Rose of the Hills.

"Poor sick one," she whispered. "What may I do?"

And the patient motioned to the water pitcher. After a long drink of its cool contents, she tried to rise, only to sink back weakly on the bed.

"Is he safe?" she asked, and her nurse, thinking the inquiry to be of Senascot, slowly shook a listless head.

"I do not know. I trust he has not gone far," she said in dull tones.

Rose of the Hills opened her eyes wide. Weak as she was, love wondered at brevity of a reply where a loved one was concerned. For she inquired of Francis Birnon, a man whose slightest whim would have been her delighted law. For Senascot, she had no single thought. She had promised to become his wife. Would keep a plighted word. But her whole soul sickened for a white man; one scarcely giving her a second thought. And when remembrance wakened, imagination painted — a squaw! Yet the smile flashed from dark eyes, when a bullet had sought its billet, a gentle touch of approbation on a trembling shoulder, were treasures concealed most dearly in the poverty-stricken storehouse of an Indian maiden's memory.

"You must rest," Madeline said gently, taking notice of the strong emotion exciting her patient. "Sleep, if you would gain strength."

"Rose of the Hills would know if the young man is safe?" she asked in a querulous whisper.

Her nurse, in the hope of quieting a fretful invalid, moved to the window, straining eyes to catch a glimpse of the Indian. "Senascot was wounded —" she began, but was suddenly interrupted by a question rousing her curiosity.

"The prisoner — he — he is safe?" the sick girl asked quickly, struggling upright, to gaze with imploring eyes to the white face of a woman, stricken dumb for the moment.

"What had you to do with him?" she demanded. "What had *you* to do with him?" The last in a whisper, strained, almost fierce. And Rose of the Hills flushed scarlet.

"Yes, what had she to do with a white man?" she asked herself. What indeed! Then she fell back on the pillows, shaken with a storm of tears, as on her innocent mind dawned the fact, this white woman, his sweetheart, suspected some disgraceful connection existed between him and her own clean body.

"What had *you* to do with that stranger?" came the harsh imperious demand. For Madeline McLeod, pure as snow herself, was aware of scandalous intrigues openly taking place between the soldiers and the women of the Missassagas. Though her sweet soul was filled with love of Francis Birnon, he was, after all, only a man. This Indian, pretty enough to distract his mind from an unspoken allegiance to her own fairer self. "What — what had you to do with him?" she repeated jealously, and the sick woman, with heaving bosom, tried to calm an excited voice.

"He came to the tepee," she cried wildly; "Rose of the Hills was there — saw him, tended him while he slept. She came to this place. Would reach Niagara. Senascot found her — would go with her — that is all. Rose of the Hills is a good girl." Then she fell back on the bed moaning, but not another word would she answer to an insistent questioning.

Madeline was very angry, exceeding jealous, most deeply offended. She knew the girl. A model of propriety where common soldiers were concerned. But her lover — a gentleman despite his rags. He was of different mold. Had he succumbed to the influence of other eyes? What was this moaning girl to him? And more dreadful question — what was he to her? She stood thinking of these things to the exclusion of all else. Even the safety of a lover, whose constancy she sadly feared, had been sorely strained, if not already broken, second to this horrid jealousy. Thought of her own swift passion rushed headlong on a maiden mind. And she shuddered at unmaidenly forwardness. Trembled to think — and the thought was bitter — she had been only too ready to surrender untouched lips to a complete stranger. He, finding an easy victim, more than eager to avail himself of a passionate, unrestrained love.

"Father, my dear father!" she exclaimed with dry lips. "Oh, that you were here to comfort your wretched daughter!" Then his misery, chained felon in a reeking prison, beyond help, came to mind, and with unsteady feet she paced the room, thinking, thinking, of what to do.

Outside, in the busy stockade, brief excitement at the arrest of two men swiftly faded. Under a chill sky, suddenly grown thick with misty vapor, the labor of rebuilding was rushed feverishly forward by both Captain de Celeron and his grizzled

sub. The squared logs were already rafter high. Men wielded splitting axes, making shingle with tireless energy. Close by, several brawny figures trimmed poles for the roof, intended by at least one man to be in position by dark of the following evening.

He, the commander, stood with stiff neck wrapped in a fold of linen, watching closely, finding fault with the every exertion of his energetic sub, driving soldiers and laborers to desperate efforts, by the aid of a scathing tongue.

The old man instinctively understood he was in the way; that his officer desired occasion to disrate him to the ranks. And he worked the harder to retain three stripes, for the sake of a girl, and the power to come and go unquestioned as he pleased. "Name of a million devil fish," he muttered, "he is determined to lose me my reputation as a commander of men. I will show him a thing or two; give him a lesson of Dieskau's teaching. The art of making a soldier work twenty-five hours in the twenty-four. The little cub! He, to worry a nurse."

With a vindictive scowl, he unloosed the venomous vocabulary of his well-stored mind. The sweating laborers redoubled their efforts, until Captain de Celeron, much against his will, was forced to acknowledge the capability of his Sergeant, as a man driver and a work producer.

"You seem anxious to provide a prison for two friends," he sneered. And the other, flinging off the drops on a heated forehead, replied most respectfully:

"I but obey orders," he said slowly. "I have always done so at all costs. I am but the instrument, let the task be what it will. They do not hang the knife when they catch the murderer, my Captain," he added impressively.

The young man glared his dislike. For a moment, hesitated as if to take the old man to task for insolence. Thinking that he was like to make matters worse, in that interference would delay the work in hand, he turned abruptly, walking to the storehouse, discovering Peche bustling about examining the trade goods.

"Well, what progress have you made?" he asked shortly, as the man, all attention and eager to please, hurried to his side.

"Little enough," he answered. "I may not in one day understand the ins and outs of a business that seems to depend for success on lying and cheating others."

"Were those the only qualifications, Peche, you stand proficient this moment." And the Corporal flushed to the roots of his thick hair. "Enough of that — see you ask only fair prices. I would not have custom —'tis little enough we have — driven to the British."

Scowling thoughtfully, as one weighing a knotty problem, the would-be storekeeper, said, "'Twill soon be at my finger ends, my Captain. I can easy take pattern from the books of McLeod." Already his robber instincts pointed the way to gain, while he pleased his officer. Something of the sort must have crossed that gentleman's mind, for he interrupted, with a sour smile, when Peche, disliking to be disturbed at a pleasing task, said, "There be many skins on hand —"

"Bring the books. I will examine them for myself. There may be papers among their pages." And his companion frowned. He desired time to scan their records, that he might increase prices, and thereby add a trifle to his pocket. "Why do you hesitate? Bring the books at once. There may be other pages between their covers."

"'Twill be a work of time — this storekeeping," Peche ventured.

"Doubtless you wish to be first, my man. Come! The books at once." And the Corporal, concealing his discomfiture, proceeded to a huge chest standing in one corner. After a pretended difficulty with the lock, sneered at by the waiting officer, he brought to light the heavy tomes, on whose neat pages were inscribed in a feminine handwriting the many records of business at the outpost. "Ah, Peche, what would you give to find thievery in these," Captain de Celeron laughed. Then bent to his task.

Many hours he paid a close attention to the even lines, and cleanly written figures. With his slight knowledge of bookkeeping, not one error could he discover in the columns that balanced to a centime. "Ten thousand devils," he muttered angrily, "but our storekeeper is more than clever at such work." Then again commenced an eager search, anxious to uncover fraud.

He knew something of the difficulty of balances; had been in charge of the commissariat department at Niagara, and on occasion had been forced to dip deep into a slender pocket to repair sundry errors, incapable of explanation, that would oc-

cur at the monthly audit, in spite of a minute attention to debit and credit. At length he studied, at last gave up his task.

"Curse him," he muttered, "he is a wonder at his trade. More than honest, too, as far as I may discover. 'Twere few possessing his opportunity, that would not feather their own nests." Then he said to Peche at his elbow, "What more does the chest contain?" And once again a rummaging commenced among the storekeeper's private possessions.

With rough hands, the Corporal turned over the few remaining papers. Among them a parchment covered with crabbed writing, bearing on its crackling surface a mystic eye, a large black seal, and along a much frayed side the inscription, "Rene de Laudonniere." Underneath "Ne Varietur." One other scrap of paper there was, setting forth of how, two persons, "Madeline Birnon, spinster, and Norman McLeod, bachelor, both of this parish, have on the 22nd of August, in the year of our Lord, seventeen hundred and thirty-eight, received the Holy Sacrament of marriage at my hands." Signed by a writer, whose autograph was but a running scrawl.

Nothing else was there of value, and the searcher, disappointed at a failure to find hidden gold, rose from aching knees to lay them before his officer. He sat lost in thought of one, obstinately hidden behind the closed door of the inner room. A frown of displeasure crossed his forehead at being disturbed in a gloating of what should happen, once the clerk was dead and buried, and the hidden one be at his command.

"Well, what have you chanced on, that you stand staring as though the devil came to take you home?" he said angrily. And the Corporal, seeing his evident temper, pointed a dirty stub finger at the papers.

"That is all, my Captain," he answered respectfully.

"Two musty parchments. Faugh! they smell of mold." Then eagerly, "What have we here? Rene de Laudonniere. Who may he be? Well, I know not what the purport of his signature — this, appears to be the certainty of a daughter's birth in wedlock. She may not be so fortunate. I will inquire of her as to the first."

Jumping to his feet he crossed the room to tap with an air of doubt on the silent panel. Three applications of noisy fingers brought no response. Becoming alarmed at the continued silence, he commenced pounding heavily on the door

with the hilt of his sword. And again, for some minutes, he was disappointed.

"Admit me at once, I wish to speak with Monsieur Ambrose," he called, enraged by the silence.

Suddenly the door opened, revealing the unsteady figure of the man he asked for. Behind that totterer, his keen eyes caught sight of a trembling girl, whose arms were passed about her companion, supporting him to the best of her slender strength.

"I am here, young sir," Ambrose muttered painfully, "What do you wish? I pray you be brief — I — I am a weak man."

"I desired to know of your welfare, Monsieur," Captain de Celeron said, starting back, so surprised was he at the sight of a man, he believed many lengths on a last journey. "I —"

"As you may see, I am a man near spent," interrupted the other. "I thank you for the attention, and now — now I would retire to rest."

"Is there naught I may do?" The persistence prompted by sight of a trembling figure striving to hide. "Naught for mademoiselle?"

Ambrose waved a feeble hand. "We need only food and water," he replied. "The maid and I would be alone." And the unwelcome visitor crimsoned, at the blank refusal.

"I must speak with her," he said fiercely, attempting to push past. But a portly personality barred his entrance, and he savaged his lip, to suppress words unfitted for womanly hearing. "At least, permit me to enter — see to your accommodation," he insisted, trying to speak calmly. Again Ambrose shook his head; motioned the girl to close the door.

"Mademoiselle McLeod, I must speak with you concerning your father. Must — and will," the young man insisted, and the secretary, trembling, white-faced with an agony of pain, fumbled at his beads, his twitching fingers found difficulty in securing.

"The maiden leaves not my side," he gasped. "By this cross, I command you to go." Here he attempted to hold up the carven emblem of his faith to blazing eyes. "By — by this cross, and the Abbe's displeasure."

Captain de Celeron stepped back, rage in his heart turning his features a mottled hue. The door was suddenly banged to

in his face, and with unsteady steps he hurried from the storehouse.

"Shades of hell," he muttered. "A million plagues on his cursed carcass, when he meets his master there. I would I were sure he is as near dead as he looks, and I would pluck him from his hiding place, and throw him to the 'pit,' to keep a short company with those other two." Then he reached the quarters of Sergeant Pere, threw himself into a chair, scheming the best and shortest way to come at a girl, whose company was fast becoming a mania to an obsessed mind.

He sat, while the midday sun climbed to the zenith; crouched as the warm rays penetrated the room in which he pondered. Then a mad idea crossed his mind, and snapping fingers betrayed delight.

"I will do it," he muttered. "When her father stands beneath a tree, the rope about his neck, his danger will frighten her to relenting. But I must go slow. The fat beast may summon the soldiers to her side. They may even obey, knowing who is his master." He laughed. "I can wait, and my waiting will not be long. He will soon die — may the devil seize him when he does."

He suddenly rose, cheered wonderfully, at his plan. When he came to his energetic sub, vociferous, panting with exertion, he even smiled. "You do well, my good fellow," he said. "We shall soon be prepared to face the winter." And his polite manner gave the old man food for reflection.

"Name of a fish," muttered he, scowling thoughtfully, "what has happened? He must be planning some pleasing mischief; I would give much to know what Satan's work he has in mind. I must gain the ear of my little cabbage; perhaps he has seen her. Found a way to gain her favor — God's name, I trust she goes not too far with him." The thought caused his mind much worry, soothed only in some degree by a renewed tongue thrashing of the laborers, each man near to the point of open rebellion against such a taskmaster.

When Madeline slammed the door in the face of a most unwelcome and much dreaded visitor, her companion leaned against the door for support. "Daughter," he whispered, tottering to a welcome couch, on which he dropped as if exhausted, "I am near gone. I — I know it." And as she held the rum to his lips, "Ah — that is better — much bet-

ter. What have they done with the young man, the dumb one — and your father? The soldier, who was kind to me, where is he? I must speak with him — must," he added in a firm strong voice. And the girl with white lips told him the tale of an hour.

"My father is imprisoned," she said wearily, "with — with Francis for company. Sergeant Pere is doubtless on duty, with his officer, who gave orders no one may be admitted to us without his order."

"Is he so daring? Does he so disregard my wish to have the poor fellow placed in a more comfortable spot? How may I reason with a prisoner in such abominable hole?"

"Monsieur Ambrose, since his illness Captain de Celeron has acted in a most strange manner. I think him not yet recovered. He never spoke to me — never attempted such insult in the days gone by. He —"

"Is mad, child. Mad! The Abbe, my master, will sorely take him to task, when he hears of the treatment an honored secretary has undergone at his hands." Then the strength of the speaker seemed suddenly spent, for he lay back on the couch, with closed eyes, muttering to himself, "He is mad. Mad! Mad as I was, when I sought to remain in this accursed spot."

Madeline shuddered. The moment seemed arrived when her companion had also lost reason. She fell hastily to the bathing of his forehead with liquor, until he again mustered strength to sit upright.

"Where is the good soldier?" he said weakly. "I must speak with him. He will know what may be done. I must speak with him." He muttered so angrily, that the girl assured him she would do his will, and at last soothed to calmness, by repeated assurance, he lay back and seemed to fall into a stupor of weakness. "You — you are good," he tried to smile.

Then a fright seized her. The man lay so still his soul seemed departed. Stooping, she held a trembling breath for sound of his respiration until a muffled groaning, reassured her, that life remained. "What if he die?" she asked herself. "He shall not. Oh, Francis — father!" she called and Peche, sneaking to the door, gruffly bade her be silent or he would call his officer. That dreaded appearance calmed her

hysterical longing, and for hours she sat silent.

The gloomy day wore its slow length to dismal night. The creeping hours, a continual torment to her, who seemed alone. Peche, on guard in the storehouse — his harsh voice raised loud at times, when bartering with a solitary customer — she knew in the service of Captain de Celeron. Any message by him to a devoted slave was out of the question. What to do, she had not the faintest idea. And covering her face she shuddered at thought of what the morrow was like to bring.

But once was she interrupted. The Corporal carried in a tray on which was placed a steaming venison steak. Placing the dishes on a small table, he waited for a moment. Then, with a shrug, at the greeting received for his attention, he turned on his heel, to depart without a word.

"A tear improves her appearance," he chuckled, as he stood in the empty storehouse, now closed for the night to custom. "'Twould be a pleasing task to console her grief. She is a fine woman, though a trifle thin to my taste. Little wonder baby-face lost his silly wit to her." He laughed loud. "What a woman to assist a clever man to wealth," he ended, sitting down to a lonely meal.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW SERGEANT PERE BECAME POSSESSED OF ANOTHER MAN'S TREASURE

THAT same night, long after a steaming steak had lost its warm savor and an Indian maid had received a patient attention, Madeline, by the feeble light of one tallow candle, sat in the inner room, with only the silent figure of Ambrose for company.

Once she had risen, moved to the table and attempted to eat. That one attempt, nauseating to her sick soul. A dry mouth could not moisten the food a dryer throat refused to swallow, and giving up the thought, she returned to her chair. Her once smooth hair hung in disorder about drooping shoulders; the crystals of many bitter tears were visible on pallid cheeks not long ago colored by smiles and happiness. Her eyes, once limpid in their glance, betrayed symptoms of a mind distressed; expressed by the wild stare she flashed about the dim room when Peche came to the door, hesitated, then moved away on tiptoe. The complaining boards, loud sentinels of a never-ceasing vigilance.

Ambrose, after his one request to speak with Sergeant Pere, remained in a stupor. Even his loud breathing, stilled to faint respirations, barely stirring a broad chest. Outside, the wind sobbed mournfully about the building, dying away at times to dull murmurs, then rising to furious roars that set the withered vines tapping specter messages against the horn-paned casement.

Now and again a steady repetition of the knocking caused her to start from the chair, as the possibility of some unwelcome intruder, seeking entrance through a slight protection, forced its horrid thought to a dulled mind. Three times she moved to the window, over whose gaping blackness a blanket was pinned to shut out the night. Thrice had she sought to draw aside the comforting shade. Each occasion had trembling limbs refused to obey. And she returned to her chair,

drawn close to the silent secretary for the sake of senseless, though precious company.

A louder, more insistent knocking, repeated at steady intervals, as though to attract attention to the knocker, fell on her strained ears. She rose, crept to the window, swayed, and fright caused her hands to tear away the blanket from its slight fastenings. A face was pressed close to the panes. For one moment faintness gripped a sickening hold, and with arms extended she sought to thrust off the gleaming eyes striving to peer within. Then the scarred face of Sergeant Pere came clear to her swimming vision. With a low sob of relief she hurriedly opened the window to the terrifying night, and the old man clambering in, as hurriedly restored the blanket to its former position. But he left the casement wide, to allow opportunity of escape.

Then he turned to clasp her within the safety of his two strong arms. "Never cry, little one," he soothed. "Never cry. Those bright eyes were never made for weeping." And as she continued sobbing, "What a greeting to an old friend."

"Oh, Sergeant," she moaned, "I was so frightened." Then Peche stole to the door, listened. Waited a long moment ere he moved off. "I did try to be brave, but the loneliness!—"

"Name of a fish, I am frightened too. Had it not been that our little officer returned to his old love, the bottle, I had never reached your side. He is no better?" he asked, and the girl shook her head.

"I think him near death," she whispered in awed tones, going on to speak of the reception accorded to Captain de Celeron, and the urgent request to speak with the "good soldier." "He has been exceeding ill," she said slowly.

"He is brave, now he nears the end. Strange, one so timorous should at the last change so greatly in manner. I wonder he dared De Celeron. He was here? What did you with him to make him so pleasant?" And the girl entered into a detailed account of the young man's doings. Of his evident hostility, and her fears as to what might befall her only friend, who shook his head, unable to fathom the mysterious change in his officer. That warning sense of another, that subtle attraction, rousing a sleeper to perception of strange company in the chamber, even while sleep clouds the brain and

dulls the most intelligent intellect, caused Ambrose to open his eyes — to even sit upright, staring wildly about.

The old man softly hurried to his side. With gentle hand pressed him back on the couch. "Quiet! Quiet, Monsieur Secretary," he whispered. "I am here in response to your desire. What is it you wish?" And the fat man, nodding, clasped a hand outstretched in greeting. His clutch so clammy, a shudder rippled through the strong body, bent over to assist his movements.

"Good soldier," he muttered feebly, "'twas time you came. I am — am near my end. I have done all I may to protect this maid.— Now, now comes your turn. I a — a sinful man, near death must speak. She has been good — kind, to me. I —" Then his tired eyes closed again, and Sergeant Pere motioned to Madeline for the spirit bottle.

"The rum, little one," he said. "Quick! he wishes to say some message — perhaps 'tis to his master."

Ambrose, swallowing a little of the liquor, gasped, then seemed to recover strength. "There is little time," he said. "Hark, my good man — I have much to say. 'Tis of this maiden. I know the commandant of this place to be a wicked man; I — a timorous soul — would prevent crime. The prisoner is beyond me." Madeline moaned, as Ambrose smiled a weak encouragement. "Yes, daughter, beyond me. He is lost — but you must be saved from harm."

He pressed one flabby hand on his chest, stabbed by a pang choking him nigh to suffocation. Again the old soldier held the cup to his lips and he drank deep. Near drained the liquor. He suddenly sat erect without assistance, to speak, his voice quite strong. "Ah, that is better, much — much better. Now, soldier, I must say my say and be done."

"Calm yourself, Monsieur Secretary. I have this day sent for assistance. Brother Alonzo will return immediately, when he knows the state of affairs."

"Too late — too late. I shall have set out on a much longer journey than the doctor. He will be too late to save me — but, daughter, he may arrive in time to save you. Hearken to a man near his God. There is but one way to save your precious soul from hell: your body from the flames of a bad man's lust. I may not protect you, but, but — this good soldier can, an he will, keep you pure — save you from

worse than death, if you swear betrothal to him."

At the word, Madeline snatched the hand he held. Gazed on him as though she thought him mad. "Become betrothed to Sergeant Pere!" she gasped, white to the lips, and the tone of her voice intimated to a listener, with what horror she regarded such proposal. "Become betrothed to Sergeant Pere," she repeated slowly, and that listener shuddered. Of a sudden came to his mind the full knowledge of his aging years.

"Yes, my daughter," Ambrose said earnestly. "'Tis the only way. Naught else can save you from a desperate man. Think well, my child. And you, good soldier, think well ere you refuse." Then he added softly, "The young man is beyond earthly assistance, I, a dying man, am sure."

Madeline stood dazed, her eyes distended, while a reeling brain pictured a supposed spy, strong, in the first flush of manhood, struggling for breath at the end of a swaying rope. With a shriek she tumbled headlong, departing to the land of merciful unconsciousness. Sergeant Pere rushed to her side, and the noise of his heavy tread caused Peche to run to the door, loudly demanding admittance while his heavy fists pounded the panel.

"Open! Open, I say," he shouted loud. "Who makes such noise within? Open, ere I break down the door." Then resumed a futile hammering on senseless wood, until, mystified by the dead silence following his efforts, he ran from the room in search of Captain de Celeron.

Sergeant Pere lifted the girl from the floor, carrying her to a chair. "You were too abrupt, Monsieur Secretary," he snarled, endeavoring to rouse his idol to life.

"'Tis the only course, good soldier," Ambrose murmured. "The only way to save her. A canon of our Church recognizes such betrothal between two who — who may be beyond the services of her servants. Provided a priest be not within reach, and you both express intention to wed, you may live together, even, without sin in the eyes of the Church, do you immediately receive the Holy Sacrament of Marriage at the earliest possible moment."

"I dare not," whispered the old man. "I could never dare. She is not willing and —"

"She must be made so," Ambrose said, and the other hesitated. He had no mind to step into the shoes of Francis

Birnon through a gateway of fear, whose vista had robbed a girl of consciousness. His face reddened, as he stubbornly shook a grizzled head.

"I dare not. No, will not. She is but a child."

"I thought you brave," the secretary gasped. His breath was exceeding short, and excitement was draining strength. "One daring all for her sake."

"Not that way. Not that way."

"Dare you stand on one side and see her suffer? Are you, a soldier, grown so fearful you may not protect a maid?"

"Not in that way," came the dazed answer. "Not in that way."

"Then you will see her suffer? The maid you profess to love?"

"No! No!"

"Know a thousand deaths in her suffering, when your officer shall have destroyed both body and soul?"

"God, no! He dare not."

"He will." And as the other groaned, "I see — I see, 'tis fear of him, his displeasure, that turns you coward." Ambrose was bitter, even in a struggle for breath. Thought his companion but a common boaster. "A coward, such as myself. Two cowards who dare not protect one weak woman," he murmured bitterly, wringing his hands.

Sergeant Pere stepped forward, his scar taking on a deeper tint of color. Murder gleamed in eyes, staring hate of that word. "My officer dare not say so much to me," he said savagely. "Were you not a man nigh to death —" He hesitated as Ambrose winced. "I regret such violence," he said gently, "but no man may call me coward, and live to say I did not try to make him swallow the word."

"Then become betrothed to this poor maid," Ambrose said slowly. "Prove by such a deed you are brave as you say." But the old man shook his head, biting white lips to stay a rush of angry words coming from the depths of his startled heart.

Suddenly the secretary staggered upright. Came close, to clutch him by the arm. Implored him to consider, and tears streamed down fat cheeks, so intense the pleading of a clerk, wakened to deadly peril of a woman. But all the old soldier could mutter, was — "What will she say? I dare not — no. I dare not. What will she say?"

"She will thank God daily for such care," came the feeble reply. "Thank Him, a brave man came to render such assistance."

Ambrose was growing weak. The false strength of the liquor fast disappeared. He swayed, would have fallen, had not his companion grasped one limp arm, assisting him to a welcome couch. "You have but little time to consider, good soldier," he groaned, and so faint his voice, the other trembled the end was near.

"If 'tis the only way," he muttered shamefaced and bashful, "I will — that is, an she be willing."

A smile of intense satisfaction stole over the face of Ambrose. "Rouse her then. Haste! I would hear her say so — that I may depart in peace." He closed his eyes, to lie back on the couch, as Sergeant Pere tenderly tried to restore consciousness to the girl he was to rob of peace, while endeavoring to procure her safety.

Suddenly she sat up, and her first words were, "I cannot. I dare not."

Ambrose seemed to regain strength. "You must, daughter. I command it. Hark!" he said, and the trampling of many feet came rushing to murder silence. "Which will you choose, child?" he asked. And she shuddered.

"I will," she feebly cried. Anything but that, she thought. "I will." And Sergeant Pere smiled a wonderful smile.

A loud authoritative knock startled them. A harsh voice demanding admittance shouted loud, "Open, open, I say." And Captain de Celeron could be plainly heard, commanding the door to be battered down.

Sergeant Pere assisted the girl to her feet, and in that moment the touch of his lean hand, the sense of security in his presence, the knowledge he would lay down the remnant of a long life in her service, swept her soul. Suddenly she turned, hiding a white face on his trembling shoulder. "I will," she murmured. And her future husband colored the hue of a ripened winter apple, as she repeated with a sob, "I will — I must."

Ambrose staggered upright. "You both desire betrothal?" he said in a loud voice, and a howl of rage penetrated the room, from the outer darkness. "Then, Madeline McLeod, you truly swear to be faithful to this man all the days of your

life?" And as a fainting nod was his reply, he said, "And you, good soldier, Pere, also are of the same mind?" A sonorous assent was given, and Ambrose smiled, as he raised his hands in a blessing. Then he raised his voice to say, "Captain de Celeron, take warning, these my children be under protection of Holy Church."

Madeline gasped, as the words left his lips. Then screamed, for the smile on his features faded swift. He tottered, fell, his last word on earth spoken, for that same moment he passed into the Presence of his Maker. And a moaning girl rushed to his side, her first words as a promised wife, the name of a lover, who from the moment must now be totally forgotten.

"Francis! Francis!" she moaned. "What have I done? Oh, how could you persuade me to such dreadful doing?" she cried, clutching at the dead man's cassock; he, smiling the inscrutable smile of those beyond the suffering of a mere woman. "Oh, how could you, how could you?"

A thundering succession of blows broke in on her sobbing. The door was splintered from its hinges. Over the wrecked wood sprang Captain de Celeron, white faced, furious with rage, accompanied by several soldiers. "Seize him," he stuttered. "Seize him — throw him to the 'pit.' You vile robber." But the ancient one paid slight attention. His eyes were riveted on his betrothed, sobbing at a dead man's side. He did not even feel the fetters Peche placed upon his wrists.

Then the young man angrily turned on her. "Now, Mademoiselle McLeod, what means this refusal to admit an officer of New France? What mischief do you plan in company with two rogues?" Receiving but sobs for answer, he rushed to the old man. "You — you —" he stuttered — "what have you to say? Explain your presence here, in violation of my direct command."

For reply he heard, "The secretary desired speech with me."

"What could he have to say that I could not hear? Answer."

"That I must firmly decline to do," the old man said respectfully, in a tone that maddened his officer to extremity.

"Ten thousand devils seize your vile carcass," he hissed, and raising a clenched hand smashed it full weight into leathery features, blazing a fury at the undeserved blow. "That,

for your silence!"

"Coward!" came the cold, contemptuous word, and such stillness fell on the scene Madeline raised her head, horrified, to see blood trickling down the nostrils of her champion.

"Coward indeed," she exclaimed with flashing eyes, that boldly confronted the red features of the younger man. "Coward indeed, as you always were at heart where women and weaker ones be concerned. Brute — *I* say, to strike a man old enough to be father to you." And Sergeant Pere, proud of her bravery, experienced a sense of dislike at the reference to his age.

Some of the soldiers were scowling — Captain de Celeron noted that fact from under lowered eyelids. They were evidently in sympathy with the girl, he thought. He must go carefully. Mutiny had happened for the sake of an injured woman, or one who posed as such. Then he tried to smile.

"Sergeant Pere," he said thickly, "'twas in the heat of passion — that blow. I regret — am sorry." And the words came near choking breath, so maddened he was at the forced apology. "But your offense is none the less, in disobeying my most positive orders. Now, answer me, why came you here?"

"To protect my person," the girl said, stepping close. "Monsieur Ambrose desired I should become betrothed to Sergeant Pere — and I obeyed."

Captain de Celeron staggered against the wall, hands pressed to a forehead behind whose whiteness a brain reeled. For one brief moment he blindly stared. Then he muttered, "Do I dream?" to stand silent, as one stunned by the force of some terrific explosion.

Madeline came the closer to him. "Yes," she said slowly and distinctly, "I say before you all, I am the betrothed wife of Sergeant Pere, a man I respect and honor above any, here. This step was taken, I repeat, by the advice of Monsieur Ambrose — who,"— here she whispered, —"lies dead before your eyes."

Again the young officer started. With twitching features crept on tiptoe to the couch. Bent a long while over the smiling, upturned face. "God!" he whispered. "Dead! Even in death he thwarted me." Suddenly he straightened, scowling at the living, whose continued existence was a sore

defeat to his purpose. "You have succeeded," he snarled. "Now is my turn. You are degraded to the ranks, for insolent disobedience."

"I demand a hearing before a proper court-martial," Sergeant Pere said hotly. "I have certain rights as a sergeant in the service of New France."

"You had, and I will prove to you at whose hands you held them. Strip him, Peche." And the Corporal eagerly seized a knife, slashing off the stripes of his ancient enemy. "Now, loose his irons. You have rights. Those of a common soldier.— To their quarters, I say. You shall have their rights, the right to protect a woman from fourteen others of your rank. Off! You fool, to even think you could outwit me."

The old man stood as one in dreamland; dazed by the high-handed proceedings. He was conscious of a stream of cursing, but he made no move to go. "Begone, you ancient idiot," was roared in his ear. "As for your other lover, Mademoiselle McLeod, I will soon make a short end of him." Then a timid touch fell on his arm, and a slender figure supported his blind footsteps toward the wrecked door.

Madeline, with one haughty glance at the raving officer, walked proudly at the side of her chosen husband. The soldiers fell back respectfully, making way for their passage. A weak girl, grown strong, protecting a once stronger man, who at the moment seemed suddenly old, in manner feeble, his movements that of senile age.

As they disappeared, Captain de Celeron turned on Peche. "Throw that carrion out," he snarled, pointing at the dead body. "Dig a hole and tumble the dog in its dirt. When that is done, wait here. I will be at my quarters. The spy shall hang in the morning, by all the devil holds most dear."

Peche smiled. Now, at last, he was to taste power. Harshly he commanded the men to his purpose, restoring the room to a former order. But he ordered the corpse of his brother to be laid in the storehouse. Then dismissing the soldiers, peeped in at Rose of the Hills, scowled, shrugged as he made himself comfortable, gloating over a future enjoyment.

Captain de Celeron stumbled across the enclosure, blind with rage. Entering the quarters of the man he had degraded, the bottle received a close attention. Vessel after vessel of rum

he poured down a parched throat, whose dryness matched an arid soul. The more he drank, the more thirsty his desire to end the life of the only living person standing in the pathway of pleasure. For, strange though it appear, the young man, enraged by drink and maddened by disappointment, had yet some thought of remaining honor where the betrothed of another soldier, however low his rank, was concerned. But — he thoroughly determined to end the life of that soldier, at the very earliest opportunity.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW A SERGEANT SOUGHT TO CARE FOR A NEW FOUND WEALTH

WHEN Madeline McLeod, with her promised husband, came out to the frown of a chill September dawn, neither had heart for conversation. The old man, yet in a dream, became conscious of a strange shyness, almost a sense of unworthiness for the company of this quiet, proud girl, silently moving at his side. With an effort he roused himself to snatch a glance at her white features. Then he lowered his eyes and walked a trifle faster.

They reached the quarters of the garrison. A bleak, long room, whose bare, whitewashed walls accentuated their extreme poverty. Accoutrements were placed at accurate intervals over as accurately made beds; tidiness, order, reigned supreme; even the white-sanded floor, smooth and level to the fraction of an inch. But comfort, homeliness, was absent. The poorest farmer in New France had more in the mean hovel he might call home.

They moved up the echoing room, deserted by the soldiers, at a noisy breakfast near by, and the old man sighed heavily as they came to the bed of Corporal Peche, placed for the sake of light and air by the window at the far end. The girl followed obediently. And not until a gentle touch upon her arm broke in on abstracted thought did she appear to realize the place in which she stood, or understand the extremity of her desolate position.

"Madeline," he said softly, near apologetic his tone, "'tis a poor place. I am sorry." And a weary light of understanding came into her troubled eyes.

"This is where, I — we, are to live?" she asked in a voice betraying slight interest in the matter of a dwelling. "With the soldiers?"

"This is where Peche slept, but 'tis no fit spot for you."

She tried hard to smile. "Anywhere is well enough — now. 'Tis better than my father, and my dear Fran—" A

sob escaped her, preventing completion of that beloved name. She had forgotten. With a gesture of apology to her promised husband of an hour she sank on the bed, staring out of the window, and staring, thinking thoughts that made her shudder.

"The men will doubtless give up the place to you," he said quickly, though in the bottom of his heart doubts of that courtesy were rampant. There were several notorious characters among the fifteen rank and file. And though they all expressed abject respect for Mademoiselle McLeod, the daughter of a civil servant, it remained to be seen whether such deference would be continued to the wife of a common soldier not much the better than themselves. "They will, of course," he added, with a glitter in his eyes that hinted of accident to the one refusing.

He moved across the room, pondering the matter. Something of the old imperious stride in his walk. If any one scoundrel dared to insult her!! Then he shivered. Chill fear crept up his spine, blanching his features and rounding his shoulders. The full knowledge that he was but a private in the ranks came home with full force. He must obey now, in place of demanding obeyance.

For a long time the two remained silent together. The present was miserable. The future seemed to hold no hope for either. The mind of one, occupied with thought of a lover very near death; the weary days of waiting that must be passed, ere dissolution released her spirit, to join a waiting soul in the great beyond. The other occupied with desire of comfort for a girl whose future must be made happy as possible by the lavishing of much care and attention on her, lonely and forlorn. She might love a younger, but not a more devoted man.

"'Twas for the best," he muttered. "Brooding over it little use. Make matters worse. Name of a fish, do any one of them seek to insult her while I live, I will cut out his tongue and cause him to swallow such stinking morsel. Name of ten thousand fishes, yes! And what do I do, sitting here like a mute at a funeral, in place of cheering her?" He rose, moved to the girl, who rewarded him with a wan smile. "Madeline," he said very softly, "grieving is of no use. What is, is. You must be made more comfortable. I will to Captain de Celeron — demand possession of your father's goods. He may not refuse me. And do the soldiers dare lift

an eyelash toward you, I — though no longer an officer — will speedily turn teacher, and my lesson will be hard to forget. Besides, little one —" Here he hesitated for a full minute and the girl listlessly nodded to show she understood. "'Twill not be for long — this betrothal of ours. I am old — very old. Past three score years and ten, by —" and he laughed loudly. "If I told you how many, you would consider me gran'pa."

Again she nodded, as though not personally concerned in the matter. Grief absorbed her. A soul cried out for one glimpse of a dashing young fellow, lying condemned to death. Just one touch of his hand; one loving glance from eyes that smiled merrily, even though their owner was dumb, would have lightened her load of sorrow. Then, thought of her father came to mind. And numbness seized a brain bewildered, sickened by thought of a future to be spent with the man at her side. She rose, silent, walked to the window, staring outside, where a gloomy sky shrouded the brilliant sun. Fit emblem, she thought, of her life to come in this world, that seemed without one hope to lighten the present darkness of a brooding misery.

The old man looked at her for many moments. And the bare matter of fact would strike home, she was selfish at heart. Not one word of sympathy had he received; not one kind word for protection, costing a degradation intolerable. Wistfully shaking his grizzled head, in silence he moved down the long room. And the noise of his stumbling footsteps sounded to him as the last walk of one condemned to an undeserved scaffold.

At the door he turned, seeking one glance from her, but her white face was pressed close against the pane, and he knew she thought of the man in the "pit." With a bitter sigh he moved on; walked slowly across the stockade, and in passing the near completed guardhouse, his ears burned with the witticisms of the laborers.

"Ha, my ancient friend," sneered Jules, descending from the roof to plant a six-foot burly body in his way, "how is the betrothed this fine day? Does she come to hand, like a wife?" And the evil sneer roused all the ready devils in the heart of the old man.

"Out of my path," he said savagely. "Stand aside. To

your work, you hunter of Indian women and stealer of cheap virtue."

A roar of laughter greeted the sally. An angrier roar issued from Jules. Maddened by the jeers of the crowd, he ran, seeking to grasp his man by the middle. Sergeant Pere was too wary to be caught by a novice in the art of attack. Swaying his lean body on one side, he leaped into the air, planting with deadly force two heavy boot heels in the other's face. And Jules suddenly lost the desire to fight. He fell, bleeding and senseless, to the ground.

"Do any others seek a mouthful of blood?" the old man asked viciously. "If so, I will oblige them. Do you think, because I have lost rank, I have lost the art of being top dog, I will wait to correct your error. Not one of you, eh?" he sneered, as the fellows returned to work. "Name of a fish, I will show you a trick of my Paris days, learnt ere I came among cowards, to forget the sight of an honest man. To your tasks, you hounds.— That should rouse the courage in you. I am but a common soldier. Come on!" But not one moved toward him, and with a diabolical grin he resumed his way.

Peche greeted his appearance with a dubious air. The Corporal was not quite sure of himself. "Where is the Captain?" he was asked, and the question brought a scowl to his unwashed face.

"In his quarters, I suppose," he answered slowly, adding quickly, "I will have you to understand, a salute is necessary when next you address me."

"Salute — ah, I forgot, but will remember. I have seen a time, Monsieur Peche, when your bare back was saluted in another and more painful manner."

The Corporal turned livid with anger. "One word more," he stuttered, "and I will hand you to the guardhouse in no easy fashion."

The ancient one smiled bitterly. "No doubt, no doubt; but where is Captain de Celeron? I did not come here to quarrel —"

"Then keep a respectful tongue in your head," came the snarl.

"I will, as I say, but pray inform me where our officer is. What I am to do. What did he command?"

"That I remain in charge, here.— Gave me rank, and orders to that effect."

"Well, a word in your ear, Peche. I would not be over sure of that same rank. The Abbe may return — Brother Alonzo, likewise. You may find both in opposition to such promotion. As for myself — an they do, my term of service expired yesterday. I will demand a court-martial from the first good gentleman. He may see eye to eye with me. So take care. He may also have something to say to the man who hounded his secretary to a painful death. I overheard a pretty history not long ago, Peche — a tale of a priest, a robber, and a flogging. Father Picquet may take you in hand, even yet, Corporal."

The features of the other turned a sickly green color. He dreaded the very mention of that illustrious name. Besides, what precious tale might not this devil of a disrated sergeant of foot relate, if the Abbe did return? One never knew exactly when and where to find him. Possibly it would be well to soothe this ancient old fool. Let him have his way — that is, an he did not ask too much. The storehouse was too choice a treasure to be spoiled by hastiness.

With a would-be smile of apology, he raised his eyes from staring on the ground. In a harsh voice, seeking in vain a cheerful smoothness, he said, "I have naught against you, Pere, that is, naught save the matter of two hundred lashes. That in the way of duty. Why seek to fasten a quarrel on me? Captain de Celeron is in his quarters, as far as I may know. He left me to go there."

"What have you done with the secretary?" the old man asked, looking about, and his companion turned swiftly aside.

"I had him buried in the cemetery," he growled, as though ashamed of such action. "Two of the men hammered together a rough coffin. He was in it. He was my only brother, and — and I could not bury him like a dog."

"Name of a fish," came the astonished exclamation, "but you are a queer one, Peche. You would have cheerfully murdered him with a dirty bit of steel, yet when he is dead, you hesitate to place his body in good clean earth." The old one pursed his lips in a soundless whistle, while his companion turned to the shelves, surfeited with a rich treasure of skins, that were never to reach a proper owner's hands. "I am off

to the Captain," he said by way of good-by, and Peche nodded, silent, glad to be rid of an unwelcome visitor.

"He is the funniest fish of a man I ever had misfortune to set eyes on," he said, moving to his late quarters. "Murder, tears over the victim, burial for a hated brother at the last. He is a marvel — a proper wonder. I am astonished at such kindness." Then he had added cause for astonishment.

The sound of a husky voice, very much out of tune, raised in a song whose ballad was none of the choicest, greeted his ears. Through a corner of the window-pane he saw his officer seated at a table, with head covered by a cap rakishly on one side, busily engaged in pouring mugful after mugful of rum down a throat, whose greediness had emptied a large bottle standing in full view.

"Again!" he muttered angrily. "Again at the cursed liquor. And to think! 'tis but a few nights gone, I saved him drowning in the vile stuff. Well — while he drinks, he may plan mischief, but will have little wit to execute it. 'Tis, perhaps, as well after all. 'Twill give me a small opportunity to match my brain against his. Me, his dry nurse! Ah — well he grins best who comes out on top."

Thoughtfully, he retraced his footsteps to the guardhouse, to come on Peche, extraordinarily busy, selecting the finest skins in stock and sorting them to bundles of neat size.

"You are busy," he said dryly, and the other faced about, looking into two keen eyes taking in all he was doing. "Does Captain de Celeron think to send them by land to Mount Royal?"

"Nay, nay, but a man must find occupation." And a most suspicious frown gathered on the forehead of Sergeant Pere. Never until this moment had he heard the Corporal express an overwhelming desire for labor. "A man must busy himself in such a spot."

"There is such a thing as being too busy — that is, with the goods of other people."

A dull-colored resentment flushed the crafty face. "Aye, there is," the thin lips said. "There is indeed, but I have my orders."

"Of course they must be obeyed then. But how they will reach the Intendant at this time of year puzzles me. The lake too rough and the roads none of the best. Well, well,

Peche, you know best." Then to come at the subject next his heart, the old man asked, "What of the prisoners, have they been fed?"

Peche, glad indeed to change the subject, assumed a would-be sympathetic air, that sat ill on his ugly face. "Poor fellows," he said. "They must indeed be hungry. I know naught of them, though. No orders were left with me." Here he grinned malignantly, adding, "That is, as to their feeding. The young one hangs in the morning, that much I know. Exact at sunrise is the order." And his companion turned the color of new fallen snow.

"At sunrise!" he echoed vacantly, and again Peche grinned.

"Such was the command," he said. Not that he cared the value of a string of beads what became of either man. His great desire of the minute, to prick an ancient enemy; the next, to be left alone to loot the storehouse and escape at the earliest, safest moment. He was quick to see his arrow had not been shot at a venture. He repeated with venom, "Yes, poor men, they hang one after the other at dawn."

He was almost careless as to anything but the getting away in safety to enjoy much luxury. Now that the brother he hated was dead and buried, nothing remained to keep him chained to a spot so dreary, save the improbable chance of vengeance on the head of this old fool, who would persist in coming to interrupt. And what was vengeance compared with loot? As to the girl — Mentally he snapped a finger. There were hundreds of fine women in New France, too ready to run at the raised finger of a moneyed man, as he would be. Besides, she was given to weeping, and tears soon spoiled beauty's smiles.

"They should be fed, of course," he said, "though 'tis only waste of good victuals."

"Are you sure, Peche, you heard aright?"

Again he scowled. Impatiently answered, "Certain, as that the sun will rise to-morrow." And Sergeant Pere threw out his hands to prevent the room closing, trap-like, about two people, as its walls seemed too anxious to shut him in. "They hang with the sunrise."

He turned to go, with, "Who is to keep an eye on the men? Captain de Celeron is —"

"Drinking, you would say? Oh, I know of it." Laugh-

ing loud, Peche ended, "I know, I know." For the occupation of the Captain fitted in well with the purpose of the Corporal.

"There is little to howl at, if such be the case. And you in command should be paying more attention to men than to skins," the old soldier said gruffly, and Peche laughed the louder.

"Perhaps. But, how would you like to command them? Eh? I dare not go. I am ordered to remain here."

"Is that your order?" came the quick question. "If so, I will obey you."

"Well, then, the walls for you, the storehouse for me. Equal division of labor. Men to you, skins to me." Here he attempted to lay a hand on the other's arm, hurriedly avoided, by a man who was in no mood to be friendly with a scoundrel he suspected of planning a robbery.

"I need no one to show me my duty," he said angrily. "If you, senior in command, as you say you are, command me to the walls, come and say so, otherwise the men will not obey me — that is, after yesterday. Come on," he said eagerly. And the Corporal obediently followed at his heels.

"Attention!" he shouted loud, as they reached the gang of men. "This man, Pere, takes command by my orders, in the absence of Captain de Celeron — who is — indisposed." Several of the men grinned because of a shouting voice, reeling off a well-known stave. "I say our Captain is indisposed, that is enough. Pere takes command. See you obey." Then he swung about, almost raced across the sand, not even waiting to see how his curt order was received, so anxious he was to return to an evil occupation.

The old man flung a bitter curse after his flying heels. Several more he directed at the soldiers and laborers, who suddenly stopped grinning, turning with an eagerness to their tasks. For a few moments his anger spent itself in a venomous relation of their individual histories as he knew them, and his own opinion thereof. His manner intimated a full intention to occupy the position Peche had raised him to, suddenly, and most unexpectedly.

"Name of a fish," he muttered, "but I am a disappointed man. Here have I hugged to my heart the delusion that Sergeant Pere, the man, was obeyed, when 'tis but the name and

title commanding respect." Then the thought of the prisoners in the "pit" came to mind. "Ten million devil fish, but I am grown old. I near forgot them altogether. I must find a way to feed them while I hold authority, which will be a bubble soon pricked, when De Celeron ceases singing and commences to talk to me."

He moved to the cookhouse, demanding broth and bread and meat on the instant. The cook forgot the military usage of Fort Toronto in supplying one of the soldier's demands. For some time the two were busy making ready for a famished pair, whose appetites had been sadly neglected.

Down in the gloomy prison of the outpost Norman McLeod and his stranger lay in absolute ignorance of passing time and the startling events accompanying its swift flight. Not a soul had come near them. And both, though silent, thought they were completely forgotten. The store blankets provided for the comfort of the younger man, on a former occasion, had been eagerly utilized. But the coverings that should have kept both warm were soaked with moisture from the wet earth on which they had lain, and the clammy, wet folds served to increase a miserable imprisonment.

Since the previous noon, not a morsel of food or sup of water had come their way. A slow starvation seemed in store, adding to the torture of iron fetters on one and the bite of tough deer sinews, binding the limbs of the other. During the long dark hours the storekeeper crouched, his mind filled with apprehension for the safety of a daughter. Desperate efforts he made to release himself. Only after his bleeding lips refused to soften the thongs about his wrists, did he give up the many attempts.

"Francis! Francis!" he called, for the silence began to wear down his nerves. "Francis, are you there?" No reply came to his straining ears, and he fell to cursing the author of his undoing, in language beyond ken of the wise and reasonable.

Then, a blinding stream of light closed his blinking eyes, and the red face of Sergeant Pere appeared, while the trap door above fell back with a thud. "Below there," he whispered. "Stand from under. I am coming down." And in a moment he was on the floor, feeling room for his feet, for his hands were occupied with two large baskets. "I would an earthquake came to fill up this hole," he muttered, as he

struck flint and steel to light a torch, that flared crimson on the scene. "And I would that same quake swallowed the man who dug its rotten space."

He was busied for several moments in freeing the two. They, after repeated rubbings of hands, arms and feet, slowly rose, eager to hear his news, and how he came to be in position to loose them to a momentary freedom. "Oh, the little fellow is at the bottle," he replied briefly. "He is busy bathing his wits again."

"May they drown forever," McLeod rasped out, and this time Sergeant Pere did not reprove the wish. "How is my girl?"

Closely observed by his companions, the old man found some difficulty in answering calmly. "Well — but anxious," he said slowly, and both heaved a sigh of relief. "Anxious for each of you — of course, I am caring for her, the best I may under present circumstances."

Birnon clasped his hand with fervor — the other was occupied in holding a bottle of broth — and McLeod smiled approvingly between huge munches of a large venison sandwich. "She said you would prove the best friend we had at this place," he said with his mouth full, and the younger man nodded energetically to show he agreed.

"Did you know what I have done," the old one muttered indistinctly, "you might both change your minds. My throat, in place of my fist, might receive a squeezing from the youngster, was he aware of it." But his mumblings passed unnoticed, and from the expression on his features, the two divined he was in trouble, but put that to his coming to themselves. McLeod, knowing his peculiar character, finished another huge sandwich, washed down with a swallow of wine, ere he broke in on his taciturnity.

"Now, Sergeant," he said, "give us the news." And the old man scowled, thinking how to say enough but not too much.

"I am to the ranks," he muttered half ashamed. "Through no fault of my own, as you should know —'twas De Celeron's whim. Then he drinks deep, leaving Peche in charge. He, the scoundrel, promotes me, and — there you are. That is how I am here." He ended, with not one word of his betrothal to a girl, or a reference to the death of the secretary.

Those facts he left until later, to become apparent to a father.— The other — well, the Corporal had said he was to die in the morning, first of the two, and he would know soon enough. "I have sent Senascot for assistance. Pray God he reaches the doctor in time."

McLeod grasped his hand, wringing his fingers until they ached. "You are a friend indeed," he said with a suspicious drop in his voice. "Madeline will be well cared for, thank the Saints." Then, swiftly, "What is to become of us?" And Sergeant Pere found great difficulty in framing a reply.

"You stay here for the present," he muttered, turning to climb the ladder, a weight of sorrow on his shoulders robbing his feet of their usual swift movement. "Pass up the blankets. I will have them dried. I dare not let you up — but to-night I may come again."

They did as he requested, after a repeated shaking of his hand. "I will not close the trap down tight," he whispered from above, and without waiting for answer, stole off to his own quarters, cursing the man he sought.

He still remained at table, but his body sprawled across its littered top, sloppy with the dregs of many drainings. His singing hushed for a time, for his face was hidden in the sleeve of one arm, whose gilt and lace showed wet with rum stains, and his loud snoring penetrated to the ears of the watcher outside.

"Poor devil," he muttered, pitying the wreck of so fine a specimen of French authority. "Bah! what do I say of him! He that would treat a girl and father so!" A sudden hatred of the man came to take pity's place, and he muttered, as he moved to the storehouse, "I wonder if I might serve her? I trust she is better. I am growing old for too much sorrow, but I must serve her, come what may."

He entered the storehouse to discover a man busier than he ever had been in all the days of a wasted life. "Be careful of overexertion, Peche," he laughed; and as the other turned, red faced with alarm, "What of the Indian maid? Is she looked to?"

"I am not nurse to her," he growled. "I cannot wait on a woman. I have other more important matters to attend."

"So it seems. But, she must have attention, yes? Would it not be well that Mademoiselle come here for a time?"

"Oh, aye — aye, aye — suit yourself," came the vicious reply. The Corporal wished the intruder anywhere but in Heaven, but was afraid to voice his wish. "Have it as you please. The Captain may but order her off, if he wakes to find her here. 'Twill not be my fault. You must take the consequences."

"Thanks, Peche," the old man grinned, pleased that a private place of rest was at hand for his little one. "Thanks," he said. But Peche only growled something about meddling, and turned to his labor, lost on the Sergeant, hastening to the guardhouse.

In a very short while, Madeline, entering by the back door of her father's apartment, was supplied with everything she needed by him, who, as he turned to leave her in possession, paused with, "Bar the door, child. I shall sleep in the outer room — that is if Peche be willing." As a troubled look came into her eyes, he added, "I will make him so. Have no fear, little one." Then he hurried off on a Good Samaritan journey, to the two prisoners in the "pit."

The young girl sighed as he left her. She noticed, he seemed grown many years the older, and conscience whispered of brutality.

"He is good, and kind —" she murmured, "but, he is not Francis." A sense of shame stole on her, swift and remorseless. "I have not said one word of comfort to him, for all he has suffered — and — and he did not wish to marry me. 'Twas Ambrose. All his fault." Then she busied herself with Rose of the Hills, unconscious, lying white and silent, as one dead. "I must be kind to him. I will," she murmured, and her lips moved in a prayer to the God devout Christians find ever ready to listen to supplication, even if in His greater wisdom, He seems forgetful of reply.

But the old soldier, unaware of the kind thoughts on his behalf, again returned to worry a much worried Corporal. "Peche," he said, "the guardhouse is nigh completed. Have I your permission to place the prisoners there for a last night?"

"Place them with the devil, for aught I care," snarled the angry, badgered man. "I am busy here. Have I not told you, 'tis your place and business outside?" Then he added anxiously, "What of Captain de Celeron?"

"He is drunk as any Missassaga after a dog feast. Will

not stir for hours. I will place him in bed —" After a pause, "Shall I?" And receiving an absent nod for reply, a tired old body hurried to the "pit," ere a change of heart should be experienced by the crafty Peche.

A new difficulty was to be thrust on his already overburdened shoulders. A crowd greeted his appearance with insistent inquiries for Captain de Celeron, or someone who should pay for work well and truly performed. Jules, with blackened features and puffed lips, voiced painfully the general desire.

"We have finished," he mumbled. "The task was hard. We now need our pay, either in trade or money. Come, tell your officer — we must be moving northward at once."

"He is indisposed," the old man said slowly, to gain time, and a squall of thunder-cloud looks greeted the announcement. "But to-morrow, or say the next day, I will arrange payment for everyone. In the meantime, you will find provisions in plenty, with a few barrels of wine needing dry throats. To the cookhouse. I will order that you be well cared for. A day or two lost here will not make much difference."

A lusty cheer arose from the crowd, who followed the old man like sheep do the shepherd, to a cook, who, when informed of the extra work to be thrust on his shoulders, was inwardly ready to be butcher. But he said nothing to the orderer of good things, who in his turn was anxious to be off, that he might assist the two in the "pit." Only, when a lean back was turned, a cook's voice rose in lamentation.

A few words served to acquaint the prisoners of their change of residence. As they climbed the ladder, both cast many an anxious glance toward the storehouse. Closely noted by their silent jailer. "Now," he said, crossing the threshold of the new building, redolent of spruce and cedar, "this is a trifle better than the place you have left, if 'tis but a change of prisons. Listen! our little Captain is drunk — there is no other word to express his condition. Were he common soldier like myself," he winced as he spoke that word, "he would be beastly drunk. As 'tis, he is an officer, and is but indisposed. So, have no fear he will come. Should he venture, keep close and quiet. Blankets I will bring, firewood in the morning. There are enough odds and ends to warm you this night — and, by the way, here is a flint and steel. You must do with what

you have eaten for supper. Good night. I must be off."

The two grasped his hands warmly. They fancied they knew how much he risked in helping them. Little they were aware of what he had already parted with in their service. But without a word, he turned, padlocked the wooden door, crossing the deserted inclosure, with quick feet to his quarters, where he swiftly undressed his insensible officer, sighing as he blew out the candle, after throwing a blanket over him.

The gloomy day had given way to a most gloomy night. Loud shouts of riotous revelry from the soldiers intimated how the men were all employed. Not a single sentry was visible on the walls, and this most glaring breach of discipline, caused a scowl to gather on his face, as he stood in the deserted stockade. "Name of a fish," he said aloud, "but what a chance for the British. 'Tis a good thing for New France, they do not suspect our condition." But he did not seek to overwork his slight authority. Hurrying to the entrance, he carefully barred the huge gate, then, with some trepidation, entered the storehouse, to find Peche eating a lonely, but plentiful supper.

"I have locked them in the guardhouse," he said, as though reporting to a respected superior. And Peche smiled absently, for his mind gloated in fancy over the approaching good times. "To-night, I stay here." And as another nod followed the first, he took himself off, to munch a biscuit. Then, throwing a heap of skins on the floor, outside the door of his betrothed, he lay down to sleep.

"While I lie here," he muttered, pulling a large pelt close about his ears, "he may steal skins, but he may not steal her. I know he is disturbed at my presence, but — name of a fish, what do I care what he likes?"

Then he composed himself to sleep. And in his slumber dreamed he was the younger by some twenty years; that his betrothed seemed to find much pleasure in his company. And in his sleep he smiled. The god of the quiet hours is a very wizard where poor mortals be concerned. In his wonderful realms stranger things have happened than that an old man dream a girl in her teens delight in the presence of a scarred, worn-out, tired, old sergeant of foot!

CHAPTER XXIX

ANCIENT HISTORY

WHEN Sergeant Pere opened his eyes the next morning, he rose and immediately repaired to the quarters of his officer. There early as it was he discovered the young man, again far gone in liquor, lying on the floor half dressed. He tried to rouse him but without effect. And when later in the day — for he would not leave his side — he attempted to point out the folly of continuing such a course, was roughly ordered to mind his own business. That night he sat at his side, until sleep overpowered his eyes, and when he returned, discovered his officer absolutely insensible, drunk as any sot seeking the short road to a debauched death.

The following days moved on in dull fashion. The old one perplexed to discover who furnished the liquor. He suspected Peche and taxed him openly. Though when taken to task the Corporal strenuously denied his guilt.

"Well, Peche," the Sergeant growled, "he gets it from someone. You say 'tis not you, and I would be last to give it him. There are but the pair of us. One must be a liar. I leave it to you, which of us. You of course are in command and there is much to do. These trappers must be paid. Will you see to that? Do so, then. We cannot feed them forever and they are anxious to be gone. I leave it to you."

He strode out, leaving the Corporal to grin, and that worthy, after some haggling with the men, sent them on their way north. Then dull monotony settled down on Fort Toronto, for not an enemy came to alarm them, and Sergeant Pere began to breathe more easily. The idea of a British approach was but the imagination of his officer, he thought. Jealousy had prompted the suspicions of the young man. That was it. And he resumed his ordinary avocations, undisturbed by Peche in the command of the men. For the Corporal waited but the first snow to vanish with his loot, that he had ready packed in bundles to bear off with the assistance of one or two tried braves of the Missassagas.

The prisoners remained in the storehouse, freed from immediate fear of death, and their position was not altogether unbearable. Though each desired to be away, they were informed by Sergeant Pere that at the present such journey was impossible. He was hard put to it to explain his reasons, but managed to satisfy them. Madeline and her patient remained unmolested, cared for by a devoted, busy slave.

Many times had he tried to persuade her to visit her father and lover in the guardhouse. Each occasion finding the girl more than ever determined not to yield to his wish. And he became much thinner, more ancient in appearance, and most feeble in walk, unwarranted even by advancing years and the worry attendant on his peculiar position. For he began to realize that, to the present moment, his sacrifice offered on the altar of love and honor was worse than useless.

The two prisoners often talked to him of the advisability of instant escape from a place so dangerous. The leaving of a debauched commander to the tender mercies of an insolent garrison. But, two difficulties lay in the road of that flight. Rose of the Hills fast failed in strength; to move her slashed body was to hasten her end, and, the old soldier discovered in the depths of a foolish heart a distinct aversion to the desertion of an unworthy officer. He knew, the instant he himself deserted — Fort Toronto would itself become a deserted waste.

"Name of a fish, McLeod," he said angrily one day, when they had talked an hour, "the way is open to you three. Why not go? I must remain. I could not leave him to starve."

"You are a soft-hearted fool," his companion exclaimed. "You know I would not go and leave you alone to settle accounts with him." And Francis Birnon — whose mouth was none the worse for its recent damage, save for two faint scars visible on either cheek — shook his head. He viewed the world through eyes whose gloominess pictured all things a drab color. He could not understand the continued absence of the girl he loved. Why she had not immediately sought him out, and why not a single word of comfort had reached him, through the medium of Sergeant Pere.

He, every morning, made new excuses for her non-appearance, and to the father, even, most remarkable silence. She was much occupied with care of a sick girl; dared not venture from her side; trusted they were both well and comfortable.

But no message of love was sent to the lover. All these, he glibly repeated, but no word of his betrothal passed his lips. In fact, he rarely mentioned her to them, and when he did his choice of words was most respectful. By no means the endearing terms a betrothed ancient should have used to a charming and youthful promised wife.

One gray afternoon, when the heavy clouds of a somber sky shed soft flakes of down to carpet the sand inclosure, the three sat about a leaping fire kindled on the stone hearth of the new guardhouse. The flames roared madly up the wide clay-chinked chimney, sputtering wrath on each tiny visitor from above, venturing down its capacious mouth.

"A bad night on the lake," McLeod ventured, as the dull pounding of heavy waves on soft shingle came to their ears.

"Bad as I ever heard in my two years' of outpost duty," Sergeant Pere remarked, sucking hard at a pipe that refused comfort to the smoker, while he thought of his patient left to the mercy of Peche, the next four hours. "'Tis bad," he ended. But referred to the condition of a senseless man, not to the live seas that swept the shore of Lake Ontario.

"Had it not been for just such storm, I had come safe to Oswego," Birnon said gloomily, and the old man pricked up his ears.

"Then you are British?" he said quickly, and the other started.

"Not exactly," he answered slowly, "though my mother was of that land. I was born at New Rochelle." And it became the storekeeper's turn to start.

"New Rochelle," he muttered; "well do I know its streets." Then sighed heavily, lowering his head on a broad chest, giving himself up to reflection the most gloomy.

Birnon rose hastily. Came to place a hand on his shoulder. "You must know my home, my grandparent — Jacques Birnon. You knew of me, or thought you did, that day when the Indians brought me in." And the shoulder the young man touched heaved convulsively.

"I was not sure," he muttered. "But your father — if you be grandson of old Jacques — he and I were close friends in the old days, ere I —" His voice trailed off into silence, as his eyes stared into the fire.

"I wonder, are you the man I am sent to seek?" Birnon

exclaimed. "His name is Rene de Laudonniere."

McLeod jumped to his feet, sweating at every pore, while his old crony muttered something wicked under his breath.

"I am that man," he said with difficulty, "or rather, I once bore that name. Years gone, aye, bitter years gone by." Then he clutched at the wall, and Sergeant Pere assisted him to a chair.

"Steady, Storekeeper," he muttered. "Naught is gained by excitement. Hear the lad out."

"I know. I will, but those lost years. Those lost years," came the trembling answer from two white lips.

Again the younger man placed a firm hand on the shoulder of the burly storekeeper. "Do not grieve," he said gently. "Madeline and I will make up every moment to you, when we come to the house of my grandparent." He ended, somewhat despondently, "That is, if we ever do."

Sergeant Pere whitened to the lips, bit them until they reddened. While he lived two young people would never know happiness. He was the stumbling block in the road to wedded bliss. The thought that the girl he worshiped could never be wife to the other and younger man — her pride would forbid denial of a betrothal, openly admitted and sworn too, to save honor — that thought was bitter. Much more bitter the knowledge that only through his own death could she taste life with a lover.

Suddenly he said, to change the subject, "Would it be well, we hear why our friend came? Of late I have been so busy, I have had small chance to gossip."

McLeod nodded. His mind was back in the past, and a tired brain needed time to leap the chasm of wasted years. "Aye," he said, "'twill keep us from thinking." And his ancient crony disagreed silently, but nodded quickly.

"My history is of small value to any," Birnon began quickly, "save to my grandfather, who pleases to say he loves me. I was, as I have informed you, born in New Rochelle, in the house of my grandparent, Jacques Birnon, the Huguenot trader to New France. You must have heard of him. My father was a soldier — I never saw him. My mother died in giving me to the world. But I had father and mother both in the person of my only living relative. For if there was thing I had not, 'twas an impossibility to procure it.

"While my grandfather traded to New France, I resided with an old nurse, and my thoughts were always of him and his wonderful voyages. With the ardor of boyhood I longed to do as he did, but he, of course, said school, and there I proved but a dull scholar. The air and freedom of the countryside appealed more to a roving mind than the restricted air of schoolhouse walls.

"At last came the day when learning and a youth were to part company forever — at least, that is what I thought. But, seeking to serve France as a soldier — my dear grandfather's wish — I was much mistaken. You see, I was not of birth, was forced to join a ranker. The influence of my powerful relation, great indeed, not sufficient to obtain a commission that would have eased my military footsteps. Under Marechal Saxe, I was at Lawfeld — I had not joined in time to be present at the battle of Fontenoy — was seriously wounded, invalided to New Rochelle, where my grandfather, just returned from a voyage, frightened at my near escape from death, implored me to relinquish the thought of glory on the field."

He paused for breath, and the old Sergeant sneered, "Glory! Name of a fish, but 'tis scurvy reward for danger — at least I have found it so." And Birnon, nodding reflectively, continued:

"That is how it may appear when one is old," he said with dubious air, "but I was young. Enthused by duty. 'Twas hard to do as he desired. However, he was then on the point of leaving for New France; said he greatly desired company, and the prospect of visiting strange seas and stranger lands reconciled me to resigning a cherished dream — that of wielding the baton of a marshal of France."

"Ah," sighed the old man, "I, too, had dreams in youth of just such rank.— See where old age has caught me; but pardon, my friend; proceed. I am interested."

"I had made some five voyages in all to New France," Birnon went on, "and the wonderful country charmed my soul. I desired to remain — become explorer, but my grandfather was aging fast, and wishing me to carry on his business, when he should have grown too old, I was compelled as a matter of duty to sail with him. One thing I may say, everything possible was mine; his one desire, to please me. To while away the monotony of the days, he would relate to me stories

of the years when he was but a poor peasant lad, living on the estate of his patron, the Comte de Laudonniere."

The storekeeper winced at the mention of his once powerful house; with difficulty repressed a groan, but composed himself to nod a desire to hear further, and the young man continued:

"His people had been on the place for many years," he said. "But, in '85 the Edict of Nantes was repealed, and the De Laudonnieres were forced to fly. To England they went, and he related of his rising to be steward of the estate, on which he remained in precarious safety. But, he also mentioned, that he never failed to remit monies every year to his former kind friend and patron."

"True," muttered McLeod, "the payments never ceased. That is how I met your father, Birnon — how we came to like each other, how we fought in the same ranks, until he was killed by a stray shot. God! how I loved him."

"So my grandfather said," the young fellow said in a pleased voice. "Then, one of the De Laudonnieres — was it you, monsieur?" and as the other nodded slowly, "the last of his race, growing tired of exile, returned to France, obtained money from my grandfather, and much against his advice, set out for the Court at Paris."

"Aye, I did," McLeod said, rising to unsteady feet, "I did, imbecile that I was. Set out for the Court, thinking to regain my patrimony; besotted idiot was I even to dream the spendthrift Louis would part with money he had need of to furnish his woman with means of extravagance. I came to Paris, gained the ear of Cardinal Fleury, became his secretary — was his most trusted servant, until — a woman came." He laughed harshly, passing a trembling hand across his eyes, that seemed again to see those mad days.— "She came, and two hot heads loved her. Two fools fought for her. One died at the first thrust, under the very window of a King forbidding the *duello* within the city walls. The other, arrested instantly, was flung into a dungeon. There he lay, until escape was connived at by the very woman for whose sake he fought — she having in the meantime married another, and tired of him. Oh, great indeed were the morals of our day in that Paris. I, assisted by your grandfather, escaped her polluted lips, to reach the shores of New France — becoming the man you see before you —

Norman McLeod, the storekeeper of Fort Toronto — the fool father, thrust into prison by command of an insolent youngster, who seeks to bring ruin on an only daughter. Of a truth, am I not a blind, besotted, miserable fool?"

He sank into a seat, covering his face with both hands, and for the moment silence descended. Again the young man came to his side, laying a strong hand on his shaking shoulder. "Then you are indeed the man I seek," he said softly, "and father of the girl I love. Will you hear my message, monsieur? My grandfather urges — nay implores that you return to France." Then he added softly, "What happiness lies in store for us at New Rochelle."

Sergeant Pere sat silent, the image of a man robbed of all his moving attributes. His lips white, his face the color of gray stone, his heart groaning inwardly with agony. Thought of the bitter news, soon to fall on the astonished ears of his two companions, robbed his limbs of movement, and he heard the younger man say, as though assured of his proposal:

"Of course, Monsieur, now that you may assure this Captain de Celeron of who, and what I am, there will be no further delay here," and he staggered to his feet, as McLeod replied eagerly, shaking hands with his pleased young discoverer.

"Of a certainty he shall not detain us one minute the longer. Madeline will be the happiest woman alive."

Both men quite sure, that she, if not accompanied by an indulgent father, would depart in safety with a devoted lover.

The old man staggered toward the door, groaning, while the two stared surprise. The thunderous crash of the door banged into place, roused Birnon, to say, "A queer old fellow — this soldier. Can it be he is angry? Vexed, because of your desire to leave? Surely he would not have you and Madeline remain."

"No —" replied McLeod, with some hesitation, "but he loves my daughter." And his companion frowned.

"Anyone may see that much," he said shortly; to add slowly, "of course he will accompany us?"

"He will not leave until his officer recover. I know him too well — inclination never interferes with plain duty where he is concerned."

"I think him foolish to wait punishment. That is all he

will receive. Of course, as you say, if duty prevent him —" A frown crossed the face of Birnon. He was a trifle jealous of this old fellow. None were to love his sweetheart, save himself and a father. The father, even, not parade too much of sentiment in that womanly direction. "Well — thank the good God I have discovered you, Comte de Lau—"

"Hush!" came the interruption. "That name were best whispered, until these shores be leagues astern."

"What need to fear any in this land, monsieur? When you read the message I am sent —"

"What have you? Is my duel forgiven, my escape forgotten? Quick!" The storekeeper grasped his companion by the shoulder, shaking him violently. "Haste, do you know what it means to live in the shadow of death?" And for answer the other sat down, picking industriously at the seams of rotten garments, whose frayed edges had well concealed their secret.

"There! Read — read a pardon for past offenses," he laughed joyously. "Obtained by my grandfather; signed by our late Sovereign Lord, Louis XIV, of Gracious Memory."

A blind grasp of the parchment, an attempted reading of the stilted characters, by eyes dim with moisture, followed. Unable to believe his vision, but hugging the precious pardon to his breast, the one time storekeeper fell back in a chair, and dry sobs shook his stalwart frame.

"God! God, I thank Thee,"— his muttering, repeated at intervals, while his companion smiled a kindly understanding of an emotion foreign to a man usually taciturn to a degree.

"You will have no objection — to,— to a son-in-law?" he asked with evident hesitation, and the other smiled.

"How could I, when he is a man after my own heart? How could I, when my only daughter loves him dearly, and why should I? Why?" Birnon grasped his hand with delighted satisfaction.

"When may we seek the commander of this place?" he asked eagerly. "He dare not detain us — now."

"He shall not," came the fierce answer. "I will show him, just who and what he is — now." The last with a bitter smile.

"I would I had come straight to you," Birnon said with eager voice. "Much misery might have been prevented."

"Had I followed a first impulse to speak, all would have been well," the other muttered. "'Twas my fault, but I hesitated because of Madeline." Then he added curiously, "How came you here? I thought to have buried the Count de Laudonniere beyond hope of resurrection."

"I heard of a French storekeeper at Oswego. Grandfather had news of such a man. He being most anxious to carry home with him in the last vessel of the season the descendant of the family to whose kindness he says he owes much, promptly dispatched me there."

"Oswego lies some distance from Fort Toronto," came the dry response.

"As I was like to find to my cost. A terrific storm frightened my Indians — I had two. They sought to land, as we were off our course. A mountainous wall of water swept us from stem to stern, and in a moment I was buried beneath the depths. How I escaped to land, I know not."

"'Twas fate — blind fate," the other muttered; "or, Providence."

"Aye, or I should not be here. When I recovered my senses, I lay on a sandy beach, with all lost, save a battered birch-bark. My Indians, drowned. I scrambled to my feet, peering over a bank, and there saw you and Madeline, returning to the Fort. I feared for my life, knowing what awaited a stranger without papers of identity in New France."

"Ah, well you came near hanging, Francis — but, thank the good God, we have little now to fear from any here."

Then they fell to talking of the future; of vine-wreathed, sunkissed France. Of home, the sweetest word in a language composed of sweetest sounds, and the happy hours fled to join those of a miserable yesterday, neither giving one thought to the old soldier, who had been savior of each in turn, as they sat contented in the comfort of the firelit room.

To each appeared the satisfactory ending of a misery, hard borne, but a greater problem remained to solve. Would the pride of a girl, her honor saved by an open betrothal to an ancient, allow of a betrothed being set on one side? Those two, ignorant of that event, were exceeding happy. Sergeant Pere was not so sure. He, of all men, knew Madeline McLeod.

Outside in the blackness of a howling gale he stood, fighting down what he termed a selfish desire to live. The one thought

insistent, happiness for her. To free her slender person from the tie, binding faster than iron fetters. He knew she would not accept his offered freedom. Yet, he also knew himself a tired old man, who could not be wanted — a man much better dead, if he desired peace and happiness to approach a young girl, who loved a younger, but never, a better man.

" Name of a fish," he muttered with blue lips, while the wind buffeted his bones, and screamed dismally in stunned ears, " what a fool is man. He would play Providence, to receive but punishment from the power he would usurp. I thwarted a stern man — clever in his way. I outwitted an officer of New France — a fool of the first water, so there was not overmuch in that, but —" and here he groaned — " I could not overreach my destiny — fate, Providence, what you will, was too strong for me, a common soldier of New France."

Then he fought his way to the very edge of the lake, whose frothing reached his boots. Stood silent on the deserted beach, gazing blindly out over storm-tossed waters, whose raging was but the poorest imitation of the stormy passion of his own greatly troubled soul.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW PECHE USED HIS KNOWLEDGE

CORPORAL PECHE stood within the storehouse, a frowning scowl on a narrow forehead, black anger in his wicked heart. Curses, wild ravings, streamed from his thin lips, as the whistling of the gale and the hollow roaring of a wind-lashed lake reached his anxious ears. The howling easterly wind, hurling tons of water, hissing, snarling, pounding on the beach, meant to his anxious mind a further delay to a plan of immediate escape from Fort Toronto, looted of its most valuable treasure.

"Fiends seize the wind," he muttered, counting with gloating eyes the many bundles of skins lying at his feet. "Such plunder rarely fell to a soldier in time of war, never in times of peace. My fool Captain drunk,"— here he laughed contemptuously —"meddling Pere bewitched by a woman who has no eyes but for a spy — and yet I may not go. Was ever such foul luck to a moneyed man, who needs but opportunity to ruffle it with the best!"

Up and down the uneven boards he tramped, stopping to peer out at intervals into the blackness, again turning away, to curse with renewed fury. His movements, those of a wild animal ceaselessly making the rounds of an iron-barred cage.

To travel by canoe — his first intention — offered the easiest, safest mode of escape. To attempt an eastward journey, over rough trails through dense forest, an undertaking he though a desperate man, had no desire to hazard. To wait the first snow-fall he could not. And then those Missassagas. He cared not to trust them too far. To tug a heavy sled alone, a labor his ease-loving body rebelled at strenuously. To the danger of remaining, was the greater danger of discovery as a thief.

He sweated as he tramped. At any moment an officer might come from Fort Niagara. Gales, storms, heat, or any of the thousand and one difficulties of travel in those days would not prevent such monthly inspection. Whoever was

detailed for duty would come. And none knew the day of his coming.— Last of all, those of the outpost to be inspected. And he, the robber, scattered the sweat of fear from his forehead. He found himself between the devils of the wind and the deep blue waters of a tossing lake. On the horns of a dilemma, that might toss him skyward, a rope about his neck, swaying, kicking, at the end of a misspent life.

"Flames of hell," he muttered, "'tis a cursed hole. I should go mad, were aught to interfere with my schemes. Even De Celeron may wake while I am absent — Pere come at any moment —'tis near his time." Thrusting arms into a gray bearskin coat, pulling his cap close about his ears, he stepped out to the night, and was blown bodily across the stockade to the room of the man he sought. "I am first," he muttered, moving cautiously to the bedside, standing for a quiet moment to note if the sleeper stirred. Then he stole to the other end of the room, pulled from his pocket a small vial. Commenced with careful, cautious hands to drop the liquid contents into a cupful of cold broth.

"Sleep!" he muttered with an evil grin. "Sleep; there is enough in this beauty to send all here to the other side — and perhaps, 'twould be a good plan!" For a moment the idea appealed strongly to him. He hesitated a long while, then shook his head. "They are all fools — but I should take to the bottle myself, did I murder them with its contents. What a future has he who possesses knowledge, and the wit to use it."

A gust of wind startled him. Stooping, he hid the cup under the bed, moved to the window, with white face and nervous expectation of a visitor. Not completely satisfied, he seated himself at the bedside, assumed an anxious air, but kept his eyes centered on the door, through whose width he expected to meet Sergeant Pere. The fool had crept up that way before. Tried to come in at inopportune moments. He sneered, as he thought of the wasted efforts. For a long time he remained quiet, lost in thought of what he would do when that cursed lake ceased pounding.

He was, as he had truly said, the possessor of knowledge.

When Captain de Celeron, drunk and incapable, had been placed in bed, he had seen one more opportunity thrust in his way to become a moneyed man. That, to keep his officer in

a continued state of stupor. When the watches were divided between himself and Pere, and his fellow nurse was absent, down the throat of his patient had he poured as much liquor as would disappear.— That, by no means a stinted quantity. But an end was put to such dosing, by the openly stated suspicion and deliberate taxing of his own hands with furnishing such doses. And he was at his wits' end to further prolong a stupefaction, necessary to successful robbery.

That is, he was until he sought the library of his memory. There, folded down, almost forgotten, remained a page of youthful learning. Soiled, that recollection of a medical training at Three Rivers, by associations with others of a trade not beneficial to health. But, the course of *materia medica* commanded by Holy Church had been his. A training necessary, where the cure of a native body ofttimes procured a native convert to Her arms. To Peche's knowledge of Christian drugging had been added gradually — and principally, because such knowledge gave him much power — the information of savage poisons, and their effect on the internal economy of those whose early demise was necessary and greatly desired. That page caused a laughing to seize him; grip him lustily in a devilish merriment.

To a Missassaga hag he hied himself one dark night. Bought her silence, and a potion at the same time, with a few pounds of sugar. Then in secret triumph he returned, and the silence of Captain de Celeron, so puzzling to one of his nurses, is explained.

So much for the knowledge of the Corporal.

Now, he was most careful to administer small doses of his means of slumber. Not the slightest desire had he to add one more murder to an already overburdened soul. But he did desire to escape with his loot. To do that safely, Captain de Celeron must remain senseless, and in that stupid state did he remain.

Sergeant Pere was more than puzzled. A stupor caused by liquor should have passed away the moment of the stupefied one's awakening. The reek of rum was plainly evident to his keen nostrils. He entered the room at odd times, in the hope of discovering who brought that rum. But he never caught the culprit. And his officer slept continuously, as though the spirit of sleep commanded obedience, and would take no denial.

Peche was crafty as a fox. He said, when taxed with the offense of pandering to a depraved taste, to account for the all-pervading smell of liquor, that he preferred to drink alone; that he had little time in which to enjoy a small tot, and that his scanty ration must be the cause of the reek. Sergeant Pere, scowling, accepted the excuse. Never so much as dreamed the other possessed sufficient knowledge of narcotic herbs and their uses. Never once thought the man would dare use such dastardly means, were they ready to his hand. But he little knew Peche, though Peche thoroughly understood Pere.

So much for the wit of Peche to use his knowledge.

He had not moved for many silent minutes. Lost in thought of the magnificence to be his when he reached Mount Royal — pelts were in great demand and how they were come at, none of the buyer's business, provided the seller asked not too large a price — he smiled, forgetting his nervousness. Then, another furious gust of wind startled him to life, and with a shrug, he reached for the cup under the bed.

"Now, baby-face," he sneered, "nurse must feed you." He raised the head of the patient, was in the very act of pouring the mess down his throat, when a harsh voice struck his ear, and the cup fell, rolling across the boards.

"Why rouse him, Peche?" Sergeant Pere asked, backing against the door to close it, while the wind strove to burst in. "Why rouse him?" he asked, curiously this time, for the face of the other was ash gray.

"I — I —" he stuttered; then near shouted, "What in the fiend's name prompts you to steal in on me as though I sought to poison him?"

"Well — did you?" came the half humorous question, and Peche who saw little humor in the situation, tried hard to recover his composure.

"Poison!" he said with a ghastly attempt at a laugh. "Poison!" he repeated, succeeding in producing a cackling noise in the back of a dry throat.

"You need rest, Peche," Sergeant Pere said quietly. His companion was shaking in every limb, and he saw no good reason, save a guilty conscience. He added dryly, "You look as though you had seen the devil, and hot company had seared your cheeks to a whiteness that will never redden again. Are you ill?"

"Ill! Nay — but, but poison?" And he stammered the word, again trying to laugh, though the sound was as a skeleton rattling fleshless jaws. "Poison," he repeated, and the Sergeant stared.

"Poison, I said," he jerked out harshly. "You harp on that word as though you intended the act. Did you? Did you?" he demanded, as suspicion stabbed deep he had interrupted an attempted tragedy. "What sought you to give him?" And he ran, seized the cup, turned it upside down to allow a last few drops to trickle on his tongue. "Damnably queer," he muttered, and the other shivered. "What in the name of your master is it? Answer me, damn you. Answer me."

Corporal Peche started as though to avoid a blow. He found himself staring into two hard-set eyes. Eyes that made him shudder. He stammered, "'Twas but a herb — a harmless herb. I have some knowledge of medicine — slight knowledge. 'Twas to do him good." His lips were hot with fear of detection. The steady glance centered full on his gray features was hard to endure. "I sought to do him good," he repeated lamely. But his companion knew he lied, and a roar left his wide mouth.

"Do him good! Do him good! Murder him, you mean, you hound," he blazed out. "Oh, I know of your tricks in the storehouse, robber scoundrel that you are. You vile thief, who would murder a brother, but had not the courage to face a rope. Have a care. Have a care, I say, or I will call the men, to throw you into the 'pit,' and I will take care you await his awakening."

Peche stood for a moment, seeking to regain breath. His tongue was sticking fast to a palate dry as sand, and for a moment speech refused to come. "You — you would accuse me of poisoning my own officer?" he said in a weak voice. "Of murder?" Then, the thought there was no proof of his intention mastered emotion, and he said angrily, "You, too, have a care. Take a real care I do not order *you* into that 'pit.' You — you, who are but a common soldier, under my command."

Sergeant Pere, crimson with rage, went suddenly the color of chalk. Much as he suspected, he could prove nothing. The man might, indeed, have been doing as he claimed. And he

might also command the soldiers — who would fast enough obey — to arrest a disrated sergeant, insolently accusing their present commander of attempted murder. And Peche, crafty ever, was keen to note his hesitation. Read confusion on his scarred features. Jumped at the chance he would remain silent, for the sake of a liberty that would protect a betrothed.

"Take care," he blustered, courage returning at the dismay pictured on the face of his companion. "You — you — thing." Then, unable to trust himself longer, he hurried from the room, leaving behind him a wondering, anxious old man, staring at a silent figure on the bed.

"Flame of the devils in all hell," he muttered, once outside in the darkness. "'Twas a near shave, a narrow, narrow shave. Had I not dropped the cup, 'twould have meant —" He violently vomited ere he could finish the sentence, so greatly had dread of discovery worked on a nervous system, harassed by more matters than murder. "Ugh!" he muttered with chattering teeth, as soon as the spell was ended and the storehouse quietness was reached, "I must have a drink." He gulped a huge quantity, ere he satisfied nerves shattered by coward fear. "I was near at my wits' end for excuse," he growled, scattering drops from a forehead creased to many scowls. "This night's work makes me more than ever anxious to be gone."

For hours he paced the creaking boards, turning this way and that for plans of instant flight. Not a single solution of the problem could an excited brain discover. Suddenly, the rum he drank caused his foul tongue to break out into horrible cursing, directed at the person of his ancient enemy, Sergeant Pere.

Madeline, in the next room, aroused from slumber by his noisy trampling, crouched against the door, panic-stricken; frightened nigh to death by the frenzy of a man, who might burst in on her loneliness, passion in his drunken brain, horrid purposes in his wicked heart. Hour after hour she listened, clutching the wood with slender fingers, whose attempts to secure a frail door were painful to intensity. Then, at last a reeling brain gave way. And she sank fainting, bereft of motion, to lie across the threshold of the room her living body would have defended to the last degree.

While Sergeant Pere had stood at the lake edge, dreadful thoughts of self-destruction clamoring at his ears, across his

mind flashed a vision of Peche, waiting for relief by the bedside of a sleeping man. "Name of a thousand devils," he muttered, "— and surely many be flying to-night — the Corporal will think I mean to take a night off. I must to him, in place of waiting like a dying fish longing for return to water. Attention, you fool!" he said aloud, roughly and with anger; "what is — is! I did what I considered my duty. What may mortal man do more? Some way will be found out of the difficulty. It shall be — must be."

Then he turned, fought his way back to the Fort against a gale that hindered every movement. Entered suddenly his quarters, to come on the man he sought, engaged on an evil task. The excitement of the moment restored all his determination to face matters to the bitter end.

"Name of a fish," he muttered, "but 'tis a queer world — a most queer crowd of animals walking its queerer ways. This Peche, now — I wonder what he sought to give you." And he walked to the bedside, to stand looking down on the silent figure he addressed. "I would give much to be sure he intended silencing you forever — but, I would that doctor-priest were here. I liked him little when he was, and now I would give ten years of life for one moment with him. What to do?" He stood thinking; then, "I wonder are you ill or drunk? If you could but speak."

For a long while he paced the room, uncertain just what course to pursue. Again, after the manner of men in lonely places, speech came to his lips.

"Would the Saints you awoke," he said with a deep sigh. "If you would but say one word, one word that would restore me my rank, matters should soon be in their places, and that rank robber in the 'pit.' As 'tis, I dare not say too much or he will thrust me there. What to do?"

His tired feet paced the boards in restless fashion, and for a long while the only sounds were the raging of the gale outside, and the steady creak of complaining wood beneath his heavy tread. And the patient lay still as the hours of yesterday. As little likely to return to existence as they, by his present death-like appearance. Then, an inspiration flashed across the mind of the old man.

"I have it," he said eagerly. "I will set a watch on my robber acquaintance. The youngster — he shall do sentry go.

'Twill not hurt him. Peche may take fright at my talk, may seek to go. If we catch him in the act — then, name of a fish, then I shall know my duty."

Quietly he moved to the bed, bending an ear down to the lips of the sleeper. Cursed the wind for the noise it made, because its roaring interfered with the sound of the faint respirations he eagerly desired to hear. "He will not move," he muttered; "if he does, I shall not be long away. I must leave that to chance. I would watch, myself, but Birnon will be more eager." With a jerk he straightened his lank form, to run out rapidly across the stockade.

"Wake!" he shouted, shaking the nearest man at hand. And as McLeod happened to be that one, "Wake, I say. Are you both dead? Name of the devil, what do you blink at? Listen — you, Birnon, I have much to say, and little time in which to explain what I want done." Aided by rapid gesticulations, he at last succeeded in explaining what he wished.

Both men stared their surprise at the diabolical contortions his features took on. The storekeeper, shaking his head in doubt as to the looting of the storehouse by its guardian. Age had crept fast on him the last few painful weeks. His once clear brain was dulled, and three or four times he muttered doubtfully of the proposed course. "How can he set out by water?" he muttered. "A fool would hesitate with the lake in such condition." But the other, younger, was all on fire to take up a watching, that might bring his longing eyes one glimpse of a divinity; one nod of a well-shaped head, to acknowledge his presence.

"Of course I will," he said eagerly. "At once." And was starting out, but the old soldier stayed him.

"Steady on, youngster," he grinned, "'tis no night to be abroad in the garb of Adam, and you wear not much more at the moment. Throw a blanket round your shoulders." Birnon, with a humorous glance at his frayed garments, through whose gaping rents the red and white of a clean body showed at every movement, thankfully accepted the covering placed carefully on his broad back.

"I shall be merry as a knight under his lady's window," he said, with a pleased smile. For he was of romantic disposition, and his coming occupation, of a nature to rouse fire in the blood. "The knight and his fair lady," he muttered to him-

self. And Sergeant Pere, indistinctly understanding, caught him up sharply.

"Night," he said, scowling; "you may well say so. 'Tis as black as the mouth of hell with the fire out to give poor sinners a rest. I wish 'twas day; 'twould be the better for our purpose. Come on." With the other at his heels, leaving McLeod in the warmth, they set out. "A cursed state of affairs," he said to the young fellow. "Not one soldier on the walls. A pretty puppet am I grown in my old days, when I may not prevent such condition in a military outpost."

They struggled to the unguarded entrance, where with a brief command to his companion that he keep watch and not fall to dreaming of a girl, who was without a doubt safe in bed, the old soldier hastily returned to the side of his officer. As he passed the cookhouse, the sound of snapping wood attracted his attention, and he opened the door, peeping inside, where the yawning cook, waited half asleep by the side of the clay-bricked oven. "Awake yet, cookie?" he asked, greeted by a snoring sound, that savored of a desire of sleep.

"Ah, Sergeant," was the drowsy reply, "you may well say so. I am kept from my bed by the wild animals you call soldiers. Bah! Soldiers. Brutes — they eat and drink enough for two men each. I boil coffee for them to bathe their throats, or they swear to cut me up with my own knife in the morning. A fine task I am set."

"Bath! — bathe!" the old man said slowly, as though some wonderful thought penetrated deep. Then he added thoughtfully, "I wonder would a bath do De Celeron good? I have half a mind to try it. How much hot water have you?" he suddenly demanded of the cook, staring in fear. "Haste, you nameless idiot, how much, I say? Is that filled?" he added, pointing to a huge caldron seething a warning of boiling over. And as a nod followed, "Here, assist me with it to my quarters. Now, keep a silent tongue, but do as I say. You may ask questions afterwards. I am in no mood to be fooled with."

The alarmed cook seized one handle of the steaming vessel, his companion the other, and together they staggered off with the boiling weight. The cook was at first alarmed. Later he was horrified, for the old man, after first cooling off the water, proceeded to Captain de Celeron, and calmly stripped him of his night clothes.

"Come on, fool," he said savagely. "I am going to bathe him in that. Oh, you may scrub it out after — those pigs will never know different. Quick, now. In with him, while 'tis hot." And together they carefully immersed as much of the naked body of their officer as would go into the boiler, rubbing him with hands, none too soft. "Did you think I intended scalding him?" as the cook breathed more freely, finding he was not expected to be present at a murder.

"I thought — I do not know what I thought, Sergeant," he said, scattering sweat from his forehead, in an atmosphere clouded with steam. "I was at a loss to understand, but now,"— here he sniffed meaningly —"a small drop of liquor might assist."

"Having laid violent hands on the body of our commander, you now desire to drink his health, eh?"

"Well —" The cook hesitated, and the old man handed over a bottle procured from a secret receptacle.

"Here, empty it, if it pleases you," he said. And, as the best part of a pint disappeared, "He should live long whose health you drank that time, cookie. Now, off with you. Take this kettle thing, and see you lose no time in making ready plenty both to eat and drink, or the men will pork you, as you do the pigs in the autumn. I know them; they be a bad crowd."

"First, we had best take the contents out of it," the man replied. And lifting the still senseless man, his body streaming water, out of the improvised bath, they wrapped him in a blanket, again rubbing him from head to foot, until the arms of each were near sore as the man they rubbed. "He should do now," cookie said with pride, and his companion nodded.

"Aye, he should — Now off with you to your quarters. Yes — you may as well take the bottle for all there is in it. Good night." And the delighted soldier disappeared, hugging to his sweating chest the easement to a parched throat.

Sergeant Pere lost his smile when the door closed. Throwing a blanket over his shoulders, he sat down to wait the effect of somewhat stringent measures, taken with a man whose disease — if it was a disease — was unknown to the healer. What would be the outcome, he wondered? Would life ever come to those silent lips? And as he pondered over the matter, his patient opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked in a feeble whisper. "Is that you, Pere?" Then, seeming satisfied, turned over slowly, his face to the wall, and once again departed to the land where speech is not a vital matter.

"He seems to understand who I am," the old one muttered. "But what I do here seems no concern of his. Now, what will he do when he wakes? Hang the youngster, send me to the 'pit,' throw in the storekeeper, for company, and — then what?"

He stared at the silent sleeper as though to command answer. But none came. Destiny was ready in his place. Harsh, the speech on her lips. The hour in which she spoke, to bring a world of sadness on a tired old man, who sat staring at nothing, wondering what was to follow his attempted cure of a youngster he had sought to fashion to a man.

Peche was also keeping watch, not on a man, but on the weather. His restless feet drove him every now and then to the door, his eyes anxiously turned to the sky, where the flying scud in parting showed a glimpse of blue. "Fortune smiles at last," he muttered hoarsely. "The wind surely dies down, though the lake roars loud. I may not set out this night, but I may prepare." He grinned, as he gloated over the bundles of costly fur at his feet. "You, my beauties, shall be hidden in the forest — near the shore." And stooping, he lifted a pack to his shoulders, moving cautiously to the door, to step softly on the wide stoop.

With keen glance he swept the stockade. A glimpse of darker shadow, within the arched entrance, caused a curse to rise to his lips. Hastily retreating inside, he threw his load on the floor, ransacking his brain for a plan to elude that disappearing shadow.

"Ten thousand devils," he muttered, "that old meddler is on the watch. May Satan seize him. The fool, to think he may prevent my going. Name of hell, I will beat him yet." Creeping to the rear window, silently throwing wide the casement, he leaned out to observe if any watched its opening. "Now," he chuckled, "I will drop them outside — he cannot see from where he stands — throw them over the wall, and in the morning — Ha, my old ancient, the night of the morning shall see me well on the road to Mount Royal."

At the coming of dawn, the storehouse was denuded of the

trade of months. Outside the walls of Fort Toronto lay many bundles of pilfered skins at the mercy of the first passer-by. But the thief was well aware few would pass that way. The Missassagas lay in their tepees, deaf to robber noises, sleeping off a debauch purchased by unusual labor. As for the garrison, they to a man were not in much better condition, and Corporal Peche, determined, when they did awake, not one should stray, while he was in temporary command.

Then he stole to the door, cautiously widened a narrow crack of opening. Scowled when he saw who had occasioned his night-long labor. "You," he muttered; "I will soon put an end to your rambles, my fine young spy. That is, if I have authority here — and I think I have — at least enough, to last me over one last day."

He chuckled as he sought a breakfast, his mind set on a speedy departure. But had he been blessed with the power of reading the future, that moment would he have seized on, to fly from the Fort, while a safe opportunity was granted to his heels.

CHAPTER XXXI

SERGEANT PERE LOSES HIS TREASURE

A WEAK dawn struggling through horn-paned windows found a nurse half asleep at the bedside of a patient lying with wondering eyes that stared about, seeking to discover a present whereabouts.

"Where am I? What is the trouble, Pere? Is all well within the Fort?" And the unexpected questioning caused a tired old soldier stiffly to rise, saluting the officer he never expected to recover.

"Yes, my Captain," he replied stammering, "you — yes, you have been ill."

"Assist me to rise," came the haughty command. "I do not understand this weakness." And his sub hastened to obey.

Captain de Celeron swayed, as his feet met the floor. His actions, as he hurriedly commenced to dress, nervous, irritable; those of a man at a loss to account for a weakness foreign to accustomed strength. When, at last having shaved with scrupulous care, he donned a proffered coat and walked to the doorway, to stand staring, as though something important had escaped memory.

"Why do I lie here?" he asked suddenly. "And since when?" Then with great excitement, "Where is Mademoiselle McLeod?"

"You were brought here —" the old soldier commenced, a sudden fear gripping at his heart. But was rudely interrupted.

"Ah! I remember — after that cursed spy attacked me. I remember now." Between teeth gritted savagely, "I swore at sunrise he should swing, and he shall."

Sergeant Pere stared. His officer placed this gloomy morning to follow the day of a tumble in the storehouse. The intervening space of many days, their startling passage a blank in the book of memory. "He must surely remember the death of Ambrose," he thought, but the next hot question proved beyond doubt Captain de Celeron was absolutely ignorant of the present state of affairs at the outpost he commanded.

"Pay my respects to the secretary," he said quickly, almost stammering in an eagerness to express meaning; jumbling his words, as though concentrated thought was difficult indeed. "Say to him, his authority may find no excuse for one mad enough to venture a blow on my person." As the other gaped open-mouthed astonishment, "If he hesitate, bring him here. If he dare refuse, I will show his clerkly wits who is master in this place. Begone, fool. Are you deaf? What ails you? Am I ever to be cautioning you on your leaning toward the enemies of New France?" And he made an irritable step toward a horror-struck man, standing, for the time deprived of all power to move.

He stood, breathless, with not the slightest intention of what to do. His lips moved in a silent prayer, that Senascot had gotten through to the doctor, and that they two were near at hand where one was most desperately needed. Then, the weakness of the Indian, the howling fury of a gale lashing the lake to mountains of mad water, stabbed memory, and with blanched face, fear gripping his stout heart, he understood all Nature seemed against the realization of his intended purposes to bring two loving hearts together.

"What do you dare mutter? Do you hesitate at my order?" he heard an imperious voice say at his ear. "Begone! ere I turn you out to mount guard. Bring this proud secretary to me at once. I have many affairs to which attention must be given, besides the hanging of a spy." He ended, a puzzled light in his eyes, that stared out to the newly shingled guardhouse; the green logs seemed sorely to bewilder a weakened mind. "When was that built?" he asked quickly, turning on his sub, watching him closely. "Are you not gone yet?" he demanded in the same breath, and Sergeant Pere hurried off.

"Bring a man from his grave," he muttered, once clear of the room. As he stumbled across the sand, "What in the name of Dieskau, shall I do with him? 'Tis a certainty he is not yet recovered. Name of a fish, but that crafty-eyed son of Satan has much to answer for. Curse him and his dosing. I would I might give him a taste of his own brew. Peche! Peche!" he called, hammering on the door of the storehouse. "Within there." And the Corporal, pretending to rub sleep from his eyes, answered his call.

"What in the name of the Evil One do you want?" he said in surly fashion.

For a full minute his companion stared him straight in the face. "Our Captain is awake," he said slowly. "In his right mind." And the guardian of the storehouse staggered back, one hand upraised, as though to ward off a threatened blow, his face turning the color of dirty snow.

"Awake!" he gasped. "Awake!"

"Aye, and you had best open store, or he will be after your hide. He is in no sweet humor, so beware."

The two regarded each other in silence. Pere, full of a sense of coming trouble; Peche, angered beyond description, because of a precious loot lying unguarded, and now, in all likelihood, never to be his. The old man, watching keenly, was now quite certain who had supplied the means of silence to an officer. "You will be busy explaining your attention to the skin trade," he sneered, and with a grin passed on to warn Madeline that Captain de Celeron was once again wide awake.

Peche, left to himself, first swore roundly; secondly, stopped to think. And his thoughts were most unpleasant. His officer, sane, was a different power to deal with than when he lay senseless and unable to dispute the introduction of nauseous doses to a helpless stomach. "Name of a million devils," he muttered, feeling nervously at his throat, "what must I do?" Then he sat down to think, but the vision of a swaying rope with something suspiciously resembling his own figure dangling at one end interfered with cool, collected reasoning.

The old soldier tapped lightly on the closed door, where lay his betrothed, and in a moment she appeared. "Madeline," he said quietly, "he is awake — at last. He may come here — I thought to warn you."

She shivered. "He has been very ill?" as her companion shrugged.

"Yes — if you may call the outcome of rum swilling an illness. But there is worse to follow, child. He forgets much — seems only to remember that day in the storehouse, when Francis tripped him and he swore to —" He hesitated, and she, white-lipped, shaking like a leaf, completed the sentence.

"To hang him?" came her whisper. "Hang him? To-day. Oh, God! Not that, not to-day." Then she burst out, "Why does Brother Alonzo tarry? Why does he not come

to prevent this most horrible murder? Oh, Sergeant, Sergeant, where can he be?"

She seized his hands, holding them with a force, causing the old man to stare. His mind was filled with bitterness. How helpless those hands to protect her. She, his betrothed, for whom he would have cheerfully sacrificed life, honor, anything — everything under the sun — called upon another. She, for whose sake death in a wind-lashed lake, had been seriously contemplated, could only moan of a priest. This Brother Alonzo, who must come first. He, the only man on earth who might save a lover's life. And Sergeant Pere near groaned out loud, so great was his jealousy of the spare doctor.

"There is no mistake — Fran — Francoeur?" she whispered, watching his features for some slight sign of hope. "None?" she added, breathless with fear, while he shook his head, hopelessly, dejectedly sure.

"Time is what we need," he muttered. "Time,"— here his voice shook with a bitterness —"that this doctor-priest may reach us — that is, if Senascot found him and he thought well to set out."

The girl stared, the light of desperation in her eyes. An idea flashed across her mind. One distasteful even to contemplate. One most difficult in execution. "Think you he would come to me, here?" she said, breathing hard. "I might reason with him — if — if he has forgotten the death of poor Ambrose, he may have forgotten our — our betrothal — your dismissal from authority." And the old man stared amazement. He thought she too wandered in her wits.

"Come here?" he exclaimed. "Come here, child? He would jump at that slight chance."

"Then say to him, I must speak with him — wish to see him on a matter of importance." And as her companion stood bewildered, "Haste! Haste! ere he go to the 'pit' to discover my father and Francis be not where he commanded them. Haste!" she said again, almost pushing him from the room. Then, seeing that he at last understood, she closed the door in his face, leaving him to descend the steps, shaking his head, unable to fathom the depth of womanly invention, suddenly called on to save a loved one from inglorious death.

He crossed the stockade, coming to his quarters. At their entrance Captain de Celeron waited, a black scowl on his

forehead, anger written in every line of a white face.

"Matters go exceeding well," he snapped out. "Not one sentry on the walls — every soldier drunk as swine Missassaga, and you — you who are first to prate of discipline, unkempt, dirty, as though from fatigue duty the most foul. How is this? What means such absolute disregard of military discipline?"

For a moment the old man hesitated, thinking what to do. Should he explain? Say of how long this imperious officer, evidently not himself, had been ill? Then, he thought, explanations would make matters much worse, and determined to hold his tongue — at least for the present. "There has been much to do, my Captain," he said. "I have hurried the men to a death-like tiredness. You know my method? As for my own untidiness, that arises from lack of time."

"See that matters be remedied at once," the other replied, fumbling at his sword, as though waiting for some guidance that would set him a right course. Passing a hand across his forehead, he muttered, "Where is Mademoiselle McLeod? She is well?" he added fiercely, at the blank look on the face of his sub. "Where is she?" And a sweat broke out on his white cheeks, prompted by fear of her absence.

Whatever else the ravages of illness had erased from his brain, her image, the remembrance of her glorious face and figure, remained stamped deep in mem y. All, but her bewitching presence, was a dark cloud, benumbing his senses and causing him to lose dignity in questioning a fool sergeant of foot as to her whereabouts. A question that should have been answered by his own eager eyes and immediate presence.

"The lady desires to see you, my Captain," the old man said slowly, and the other flashed to life.

"Why could you not say so at once, fool," he said, the flame of desire once again glowing in his heart. "She is in there?" he added, pointing to the storehouse. And receiving a nod in reply, ran across the sand, to disappear up the steps, three at a time.

A feeble old soldier slowly followed. With trouble tugging at his heart strings, a sense of overwhelming calamity clouding clear thought, he muttered, "Name of a fish, but there will be evil work. She can never hold him in his present mood. He is mad — stark, staring, raving mad with desire to be at

her side. God help us all — that cursed doctor, why does he linger." Then he mounted the steps, to stand listening, waiting — he hardly knew what to expect — but was certain trouble brooded close by.

Captain de Celeron discovered a girl seated on a couch; her hair smoothed to a hurried neatness; her dress, hastily arranged to order, the reverse of a mind, almost terrified with what she was about to do. He entered, and a shudder of hate rippled her features. Her heart beat hard within her bosom, almost suffocating her with the force of its excitement. But with calm demeanor she sat erect — summoned a smile to white lips, that quivered in spite of their owner's determination to be brave.

"Ah, ma'amselle," he said, bowing low, "'tis indeed a favor, you request my company. What may I do for you?"

"You have been ill, monsieur?" she murmured to gain time.

He nodded, breathing heavily. "So I am told," he said. "Some days have been lost — but never my love for you, Madeline." His burning eyes staring into her own, impressed deeply on her mind that something Sergeant Pere had seen in their depths. A shiver rippled her body. The man was mad! She saw it in his passionate glance, read in his every action a mad desire of herself. But she steeled her brain; summoned all her woman's wit to play a part against slow-moving time. God send her time, she prayed. Time was necessary, the old man had said — time to save her lover from a rope. With a tremendous effort, she mastered the sense of inability to move a muscle; gave back glance for stare as he came nearer, emboldened by an unlooked for graciousness. "My love for you, Madeline, I never, never could lose." And she bravely smiled, even though the hot breath at her ear caused a sickening loathing to overcome her figure.

Sergeant Pere, from where he stood with Peche, in the storehouse, heard all without moving one muscle of a leathery countenance. Only, the scar on his face turned a deeper shade of purple, as he noted a sneer on the face of his companion. "You grin, you thief," he muttered savagely, while the other shrank back. "When I have leisure, I will attend your manners. So take good heed to your health. You will need all your strength, when I come at you." Then he turned his

back, to listen eagerly. He scowled, as he looked on the two. The man tried to secure the woman's hand, and she, with a look of horror, shrank back, as though near afraid to move. "May he drop dead," he muttered.

"You must know I love you — worship you, Madeline." The hot words floated out to the ears of the old soldier, and he swore under his breath. He started, as if to run within, as he saw his officer suddenly kneel, to seize one white hand and cover the shaking fingers with a score of burning kisses.

"I pray you, rise, Captain de Celeron," she managed to stammer. "Pray, remember my father — he will be so angry with me. I beg of you to rise." And the lover, taking her to mean he would be welcome at her side, seated himself, caught her slim body close to his panting frame; pressed a shower of blistering kisses on her lips whose breathing he impeded by the suffocating pressure of his arms. "My life! My dearest," he said passionately, pausing in his continued caresses. "Give me but hope, and we are the happiest pair since Eden."

Madeline strove to release herself; sought to evade his arms of steel. "Oh, monsieur," she gasped, "I beg of you — release me. Have pity on me. Do not seek to force my poor affection."

"I will be patient, Madeline," he whispered, kissing her full on the lips. "I will indeed, do you grant me one tiny hope of true affection — that I may be rewarded as a lover should."

He sought to take her in his arms again. To hold her close. In a moment she started to her feet, her face flaming red resentment. He caught roughly at her dress, seeking to drag her down. Fear — agony of mind at what must follow if she remained longer with him in his present mad mood, seized her in its horrid grasp. Unable to restrain herself, a scream escaped her lips, and she fled from the room. In a moment he followed, robbed, as he thought, by the coyness of a maid, seeking to enhance ultimate possession by immediate flight. Again she screamed as she ran through the storehouse. And Sergeant Pere, at the sound, stepped out to plant his lean figure full in the path of her pursuer.

"Out of the way, fool," he shouted. "Out of the way, ere I cut you down." But the old one bravely stood his ground.

Stared full in the face of the man trying in vain to push him on one side.

"Fool, I am," he said quietly. "Fool and villain both, did I permit you to molest an innocent girl."

"To one side I say, imbecile. You relic of a bygone age, dare you stop me, your officer? Out of the way, ere I cut your vile body to inch pieces and throw them to the curs of the Missassagas. Idiot! Fool!" He raved on, showering blows on the head of his sub. Then, finding fists too slow for his purpose, he tugged his sword from its scabbard, to furiously threaten his ancient antagonist. "Have at you," he shouted, lunging fiercely, a thrust evaded with difficulty by the other quickly leaping to one side.

For the next few moments the storehouse was one mad welter of flying trade goods and rushing bodies. Pursued by his officer, up and down the narrow room, the old man had small chance, he thought, of escape. The singing whistle of shining steel close at his ear, sounded murder; the glare in the eye of his antagonist warned him of a murderer's intention. Coming to the counter, he leaped its height, scattering knives, trinkets and a hundred and one other articles of trade about the floor. Then, he sank on his knees, his lungs pumping air with violence, while a long keen blade madly poked across the slabs sought to take his life.

"Name of a fish!" he gasped, with a wintry smile, "'tis hard to play hide and seek when one is gone in the wind. Phew!" as a swishing blow knocked off his glazed cap, "I must be out of this." Then he crept on hands and knees behind the counter, came to the end, peeped round cautiously, to see his officer, leaning on his sword, standing statue-like in the center of the room.

"Ha! imbecile!" he shouted; "you would fight with me for the girl? Come on, fool, by all the fiends in hell I will send you there to add to their number." He ran across the room, lunging fiercely, and Sergeant Pere, attempting to dodge, slipped, and in a moment the keen blade was through his shoulder. "First blood," shouted Captain de Celeron, and his sub, turned, leaped the counter at the far end, rushed to the door, meeting Madeline returning.

"Out of the way, child. Quick!" he said, as she screamed at the sight of blood streaming down his forearm. "Quick!"

he yelled, endeavoring to push her outside. Then in one moment, a narrow steel pushed through his back, almost stabbing her in the face, and he lurched, tried to smile, with, "Take — take care, child," as he fell headlong, half in, half out of the gloomy room.

A shrill scream escaped her, kneeling to staunch the blood welling through a tattered uniform. "Oh, my dear, my dear," she moaned, while a white-faced man stole to her side, terror in his glance.

"What have I done?" he whispered. "Is that you, mademoiselle? In God's name, where am I? What have I done?" And the girl, even in the midst of a maze of horror, knew him in possession of his senses.

She turned on him fiercely, while trembling fingers strove to rip a white petticoat to bandages. "You have murdered him," she gasped. "Murdered him, the bravest soldier in all New France." And she frantically endeavored to stay the bleeding; to herself, "The most devoted lover ever ungrateful woman possessed."

Captain de Celeron dropped his sword. Leaning against the counter, he mouthed meaningless words, but rendered no assistance to her, whose efforts were concentrated in staunching the red flow trickling steadily from a bare, lean, corded chest.

The sound of hurrying footsteps came to her ears. Three figures ascended the steps, three pair of eyes took in the scene. "What means such work, my daughter?" a gentle voice asked, and in a moment Brother Alonzo with skilled hands took up her task. "Who has done such deed?" he asked again, as the crimson disappeared under many swathings of white, and Madeline sobbed her grief.

"Oh, reverend sir," she moaned, "there has been murder done. And 'twas he —" pointing wildly at the staring officer —"he who is responsible. He sought to insult me, and — and would have succeeded but for him, who lies — lies dead. He murdered him," she almost shrieked, and the doctor soothed her with a touch of quiet fingers.

"Softly, child," he said, with one angry glance toward the silent author of the trouble. "We will remove the good sergeant to some easier resting place." After a silent ten minutes, broken only by the moaning of a girl, "I fear he is

badly injured, daughter. I will do my best, but were Hippocrates here —" He shrugged, motioned to his companions, two stolid Indians, to lift the senseless man from the floor, and half carrying the girl, followed silent to the inner room.

She moved, numb with unaccustomed grief. The first approach of real sorrow, the death of a loved one, was near at hand. Her soul bewildered at such unexpected tragedy. Yet, in that misty moment, came the whisper of selfish love. Hope, life, remained for a lover by the timely arrival of the doctor. But, with a shudder, she thrust the thought away, and bending down, wiped off the gathering bubbles of red foam from the blue lips of the man who had saved her life, and perhaps prevented, worse.

Brother Alonzo, mixing a compound from a pocket case, strove to draw from her some account of the happenings occurring during his absence. She seemed to be beyond calm conversation; her whole attention riveted on the silent soldier. And he was forced to content himself with the fact, that one man should rue a horrid deed.

At intervals during the long day, he stole on tiptoe to the bedside of Rose of the Hills, anxiously bending over her silent figure. And it was very plain to the disciple of Hippocrates that two were departing in company to the land of those who never return. He shook his head, while a tear stole to his tired eyes, hastily brushed off, as he once again felt for a weak pulse in the wrist of an ancient man, whose span of years was near accomplished.

At the first touch, Sergeant Pere opened his eyes. "Where is she?" he muttered feebly. "Safe?" Then bitterly, "You — you — I could not be trusted alone to — Thank the good God she is safe — now." Then he closed his eyes, and Madeline softly kissed him on the lips.

"Oh, Francoeur," she cried, "you must not — shall not die." And her slave smiled.

"'Tis worth such end, dear," he muttered, and only her ears caught the words. "I but strove to do my duty." His eyes rested dog-like on her features, and the love in their depths stabbed the girl deeper than a knife. "I did it for you, child," he whispered. And she fell to sobbing with such violence that the doctor, alarmed for the life of his patient, gently intervened.

"Restrain yourself, child," he said sharply. "Remember, you but hasten his end." His manner was brusque, for he realized that all the skill and knowledge of a revered master, credited with deep understanding of the ailments of his day, was useless to save a life, when the high gods turned down their thumbs. "We will administer another stimulant, child," he said, and raising the patient, he held a cup to his lips; while the girl knelt, holding one calloused hand between soft and trembling fingers.

Her slightest touch seemed to restore life to his wounded body. "You are good," he whispered, "too good." As he attempted to swallow the draft, "Bitter — bitter, as death to some, but not so bitter as life to one I know of." Then he lay back and closed his eyes.

For a long hour, dumb silence gripped the room, and the anxious watchers were at times forced to strain a tense hearing for the whistling sound of his feeble breathing. Suddenly, he sat upright. In a loud strong tone, spoke with something of his bluff manner.

"I must speak with McLeod," he said. "Where is he, Madeline? Something I must say — ere I go." And as his head dropped forward on her soft bosom, a wonderful content stole into his voice. "You are good, child. Too good — but the room grows dark — cold and dark. Are you still there?" he whispered. And the doctor hurried to his side.

"I will find the storekeeper," he said. "Rest easy, good soldier." Then he almost ran from the room, for he knew the end must be at hand.

"I have done all things for the best, Madeline," the old man whispered, as the door closed, leaving them alone. "All for the best." And as she commenced to weep bitter tears, he added with a smile, "Do not cry little one. Name of a fish, 'tis much the best — that I go. Any man would have done as much, and I would not have you weep for so old and tired a man as I."

"You shame me so," she whispered, but the ancient one only shook his head, a sad smile on his scarred features. He knew the only solution had been found; the knot of difficulty cut with a sharper sword than long-drawn time was like to use. "'Tis best so," he whispered again. But his heart was wrung with one thought. Only through his own disappearance into

the dark valley could enter happiness for the girl he worshiped beyond all things earthly. And he would never see it.

She had ceased to sob. Tears were such empty comfort. Her dulled eyes glanced about the room, half dark, the splintered door adding to the gloominess of its untidiness. She saw the mud tracks of Corporal Peche, everywhere on the once spotless floor. His restless feet had kicked the neat skins into one corner, where an eyeless fox head grinned grimly at her from the crumpled bundle. Clumsy hands had torn the clean window hangings to fragments. Their shreds fluttered with every stirring breath of air. These matters held her attention for the passing minute. Then she shivered. Outside sounded, in the close of a gloomy day, the moaning of league-wide waters, sobbing their complaints to a red-hued sunset staining the cloudland mountains to a riot of crimson color. She sighed at the dreary notes. Their restless murmurs reminded her of the fitful breathing of a man about to pass into the shadows.

She started, as heavy feet mounted the steps, and her father, white-faced and breathless, hurried in. "What is it, child?" he asked. "What is it? Is he sick?" And as Francis Birnon, with the doctor, followed, he knelt beside the still figure of his crony. "I am here, old friend," he said softly, adding violently, "What devil's trick is this?" Brother Alonzo hushed him to silence, as the patient opened his eyes.

"'Tis no trick of the devil, McLeod; 'tis a trick of the sword that loosed my life," he said, striving to sit upright. "I call you all to witness, my officer did not intend to kill me. He was mad — mad. Remember, I repeat it, he was mad when he did the deed." And the lean face of the doctor took on a saintly expression as he heard.

"'Greater love hath no man than this,'" he began gently, but Sergeant Pere interrupted.

"'Tis not for his sake I say so," he said, "but for the honor of New France. I would not have her stained by relation of a murder." His eyes caught sight of Francis Birnon, moving gently to the side of the girl. "I have done something to earn a rest. Tell him — them, Madeline, when I am gone."

The three stared at the girl for explanation, but she, sitting still as white marble, shrank back — almost as though to avoid the lover, who turned away, a moody look on his handsome features. Not a word came to her closed lips, and the

wounded man smiled.

"Storekeeper," he said, "leave her be for the time. She has had trouble. She may tell you after. Listen — while I have breath. I must speak. We have been friends for years. I am a liar, a base liar. Never was I with Dieskau — never was I in action in the field. I never saw Brest. Now — now, what think you of an old friend?" Here he grasped the coat of McLeod with violence, his straining gaze centered on the face of his crony.

"Steady, as you caution me, Sergeant," the other replied gently, for he thought delirium ruled. "You never lied to me, my friend," he added with conviction. And the dying man smiled that wonderful smile coming to those who find one believer in the truth of friendship.

"But I have," he said feebly. "All my life, with you, has been a lie." He waved away the glass offered by the anxious doctor. "Nay, what need to prolong a worthless existence? I have no desire to live. Listen! Storekeeper, listen. I was a — thief, in Paris. A rascal thief, whose youth was passed among men and women the most vile. They caught me red-handed. I was transported to New France — served my sentence — joined a regiment of foot — sought — yes how eagerly I sought — to at least become the shadow of a man. Have I succeeded? Ah, I see you, you think so. You would not smile, had I offended. Name of a fish, but 'tis cold — cold — McLeod, where are you?" His head fell forward on his chest, a look of peace settled on his worn features as he fell back on the couch, lifeless, but seeming to have settled all his debts with a cast-off world.

Brother Alonzo hurried to the side of his patient. A deep sigh escaped his thin lips, that the last rites of Holy Church had not been administered. Silently, reverently, he closed the staring eyes, muttering a prayer for one he had grown almost to love. Then the living claimed his attention, and he was alert. Madeline lay full length along the floor, and with gentle voice he whispered a quiet comfort.

"He died bravely, child," he said. "What man can do more than die at the post of duty?" And her father took up the task.

"Surely, the death of a soldier, though so old a friend, should not cause such bitter tears," he said softly, trying to smile

through a mist beclouding his sight. But she made no sign, only rose from the boards. Her heart was heavy with the self-blame of a murder.

She moved with listless steps outside to the night, and the eager lover followed, leaving two elderly men with their dead, to confer on what must be done for him, and what must be taken in hand for themselves. And the younger, coming to her side, not dreaming of what his debt to the cold clay, clumsily added a world of sorrow to a heart he would have given his life to save one grief.

"Madeline," he commenced awkwardly, "why weep so bitterly for an old soldier?" And she raised her eyes to stare him full in the face.

"You can forget so easily?" she asked quickly. "After what he has done for us? You think I should not mourn his loss — my greatest friend in this place?"

Jealousy stabbed deep, that moment. Francis Birnon almost hated the silent man. "I honor you for your grief," he said coldly, "I would not have you forget one friend, but he was only a rough old soldier who is dead, and I — I am alive."

"Thanks be to him," she answered softly, "I would have you remember that."

"I do remember," he said, "and would have you remember him, but —"

"But, Francis, you are jealous," she replied, pleased to the soul he was in that condition, yet, even regretting deeply the cause of his emotion. "I will tell you some day, dear," she whispered gently. "Some day, when we are far away from this dreadful place." And with that feminine evasion of the present, her lover was forced to be content, for the sake of a hoped-for, happy future.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE END

SUNRISE found two tired men busy with discussion of ways and means. Brother Alonzo with McLeod seated at a table, on whose rough top guttered a failing dip candle, had passed the night in talk. But neither could come to any satisfactory conclusion as to why an old man had been foully murdered.

"Your daughter, she may tell us," the doctor ventured. "Yet, at the moment, 'tis not wise to aggravate her distress."

"I do not understand such grief," the father replied. "Sergeant Pere was her very good friend, but — naught more."

"I will to Captain de Celeron at once. He shall tell me, or —" And the doctor rose, his lips set, a stern light in his eyes boding little good to the man he sought. "I have something to say to him, he will find most unwelcome. You had best remain, Monsieur Storekeeper. Your daughter sleeps and one must watch her. Now — to reason with a very madman."

He walked across the stockade, greatly puzzled. Inquiry of the soldiers as to the whereabouts of their commander brought forth the statement, he had not been seen. Where he was, they had no idea. They had not set eyes on him since the previous day. To a man, they seemed indifferent as to what had become of him, but were filled with excitement, when told of the death of Sergeant Pere. The doctor noted that with his passing, discipline seemed also to have passed. For the gate was closed, and not a man guarded the length of wall.

"You had best to duty," he said to the soldier who answered his questions. "Your officer must be found. That at once." And the man grinned, but slunk off out of sight. "A pretty state of affairs," Brother Alonzo thought. Then, the open door of the guardhouse attracted his attention, and he walked inside.

There, crouched before the dead ashes of the yawning fire-

place, was the man he sought. "Ah, young sir," he said coldly, "at last. Rouse yourself, I have much to say to you." And Captain de Celeron slowly stood upright, his face white as the wood ash on the hearth.

"Is he—is he dead?" he asked with a shudder. "I cannot understand—" Here he passed a shaking hand across his forehead, and the doctor frowned.

"Not one of us present in this place understands why you murdered a brave soldier," he said quickly. "I shall be glad to have your account of the matter. First, I will warn you, that I come from His Reverence the Abbe Picquet, armed with full power as to your remaining in command. From what I have seen, his opinion of your ability was mistaken. Of course, you understand, his authority at the moment is unquestioned?"

Captain de Celeron slowly nodded. At the minute, he was in possession of his senses, though the night hour horror of his brooding had come near to tumbling reason headlong from her throne. Not to himself, could he justify the deed, that robbed a man of life. One who had been to his youth, a friend and companion, though of much lower rank and station. Why, and what for, had he stood over that senseless clay! Why? And the question worried his brain to mad distraction, until the presence of this stern priest was a welcome diversion.

"Your reverence," he replied slowly, "of late I have not been well. I know I have been sick, at least,—" a shudder rippled his frame as a loose leaf blew noisily along the floor, "Sergeant Pere . . . He said so—when . . ."

"What I desire to know, is, why you murdered him?"

"I do not know," the other burst out savagely. "I do not know. I swear by the Cross—by my hope of salvation, I do not know!"

"Liar, as well as libertine," Brother Alonzo said sternly. "Coward! You do much honor to the flag you serve."

Captain de Celeron crimsoned. One hand he laid on his sword-hilt at the insult, but the cold stare of his companion caused his hold to drop suddenly. The composed features of the spare doctor wakened some measure of reason and respect in his bewildered mind.

"I—forgive me," he stammered, "I am not myself."

"No, or you would hesitate to draw weapon upon a serv-

ant of Holy Church," came the contemptuous reply. "I warned you once — I warn you again, her arm is long and very, very sure."

"I remember, reverend sir — remember the words —" The young man spoke impulsively, then fell silent. What mattered mere warnings? Talk would not bring to life that prone figure on the floor! And naught else mattered. Why had he committed such senseless crime? Why? a thousand times why? Then he said, as if wonder forced speech to his tongue, "Why did I do it, in God's name? Why?" and the face of the doctor took on a serious expression.

"Was the man shamming ignorance, to escape the consequences of a dastardly crime?" he thought. "Was he, at heart, coward indeed?" He knitted his forehead in a frown, slowly shaking his head. He was puzzled. Among all his recorded experiences, Hippocrates made no mention of such a case.

Captain de Celeron came close. "I swear to you, reverend sir, by the Cross, by aught you please, I have no remembrance of the deed." He spoke quietly — impressively, and his manner went far to convince Brother Alonzo of his absolute sincerity.

"On your honor as an officer of New France?" he asked slowly, and the young man solemnly drew his sword, as solemnly pressed his dry lips to the hilt.

"By this Cross, I swear," he said. "And will add this — I know of no good reason why I killed a brave man and a good soldier. This is my last word, reverend sir, on my sworn honor as a French officer."

Again the doctor shook his head. "I am in the dark," he said. "The maid may tell me, later. I dare not doubt you after such statement, but, unfortunately, Sergeant Pere lies dead. How he died, and why, must be left with God, and your own conscience. At any rate, he must have fitting burial. You must see to that, young sir. After — yes, after, I will hold deep inquiry into the matter. If you are at fault —"

With a shrug, he turned away, silently, from the room. With bent brows walked across the stockade. He had many matters which required immediate attention. But the sudden death of the old man, he respected and thought much of, occupied his whole attention; thrust for the moment into the back-

ground the urgent commands of a most authoritative master. The stockade fairly hummed excitement. The soldiers, gathered together in groups of two and three, loudly discussed their ideas of fitting punishment for the murderer of their Sergeant. Brother Alonzo, from the scraps of conversation reaching his ears, was almost convinced the dead man must have occupied a greater space in their hearts than he ever was aware.

Another matter added fuel to the flames. Corporal Peche had suddenly disappeared. Though the man was practically unknown to the worthy disciple of Hippocrates, his frequently mentioned name caused a dim remembrance of a shifty-eyed fellow to rise in a shrewd old brain. He said to one, "Is this man a soldier of whom you speak? Surely he is not also dead?" and the man stammered excitedly, raising an unsteady hand to the salute.

"No, your reverence, trust him for that. He is gone — that is all. We do not know where." Then he turned to his fellows, while the doctor passed on to the storehouse, shaking his head in wonder. Fort Toronto seemed suddenly smitten with a very plague of dead and missing. As his lean figure ascended the steps, Captain de Celeron appeared. If he had really forgotten why he committed murder on the person of one soldier, he most truly remembered use of a scathing tongue to smarten the remaining fifteen to a sense of immediate duty.

"Where is Corporal Peche?" he demanded abruptly. None of the men possessing knowledge to answer the question, he shouted, "Fall in." And as they dressed into ill-formed ranks, each individual seeking to avoid the menace in the eyes of their officer, he added harshly, "Are you all dumb? Fools!" with a gnawing at his underlip. Then he fell hastily to the ordering of search parties to discover the whereabouts of his only sub, not forgetting to place a man on duty at the gate. "Parade at five of the clock," he added savagely. "Heavy marching order — muskets primed and loaded. Sergeant Pere," here he shuddered visibly, "will be buried with military honors."

The men marched silently off, and he remained a lone figure in the center of the dusty stockade. Though he had resumed command, was perfectly able to attend the most trivial

duties, the curtain of forgetfulness still shrouded the happenings of the last weeks. He knew from the chill weather, the faded grass and the withered vines about the storekeeper's lodging, much time must have elapsed since he lay sick abed. He gnawed his mustache, thinking, wondering what had caused the devil of murder to loose his arm.

"Why did I do it?" he said aloud. "Why? True, I distrusted him toward the last — I remember that much — disliked his prating of that German idiot — always. But, why he, above all men, should have met death at my hands, I do not, cannot, bring to mind."

Moodily turning, he walked to the storehouse. As he entered, the dark stain on the threshold caused a shudder. Carefully avoiding coming near the marks, he entered, and the storekeeper came out to inquire his business.

For a minute the two regarded each other with steadfast eyes. Then, with a moistening of dry lips, the younger said, "McLeod, speak to me. Why — why, as you are a man, tell me, why did I commit such useless crime?" As the other hesitated, with stony face, evident dislike in his manner, he added fiercely, "I demand to know. In the name of New France — at once."

"Captain de Celeron," came the chill answer, "I do not know. For the moment — while I remain in this place, I obey you as an officer, but though you are my superior, you will kindly refrain from anger. And this moment I must request that you speak more softly. My daughter sleeps — is in no condition to be disturbed. Such is the doctor's positive order." He spoke with grim politeness, but with scarcely veiled indifference as to the other's likes and dislikes.

"You may perhaps stay long enough to witness one of my orders," came the vindictive taunt. "I may not interfere with you or your lady daughter, but the spy shall hang. That much I swear to. You may take him with you dead — but not alive."

He laughed loud as he ended. Loud enough to bring Brother Alonzo hurrying from the inner room. "Brawling in the presence of death himself?" he said contemptuously. "Truly your wits stray far, though your brutality is ever at hand. Do you know, young sir — commander of Fort Toronto though you be — I have power to send you in chains

to Fort Niagara? Forward your person to face a court-martial of officers, who would to a man turn their backs on you, once they became aware of your shameful doings. I warn you for the last time. Remember, you dare Holy Church now, not two or three poor people without authority! Take care — I will not warn you again."

Captain de Celeron closed his eyes, to think. He paid slight attention to an old woman priest, though, of course, court-martials were most unpleasant. Talk was but folly. If he could but think. Reason clearly! There must have been good cause why he had slain the Sergeant, whose funeral had been just arranged. Then he became aware the two were curiously staring. The ugly look on the face of McLeod stung his proud soul to the quick.

"I accept your warning, reverend sir," he said, politely sarcastic. With something of his old imperious manner, "And this man's studied insolence, that I shall not forget. Since you have taken over command, reverend sir — though nothing of proof has been given me to that effect — I will report to you." Here he saluted ironically. "The firing party is ordered for five of the clock. The man I unfortunately killed," and he laid emphasis on the word, "in his mad attack on a superior officer, will receive military honors at his burial. Have you any further commands? No? Then I have the honor to wish *you* a very good day."

With brazen effrontery he swaggered off, while the two stared silent, amazed at such audacity. "Is he yet mad, reverend doctor?" McLeod said at last, and the lean one shook his head.

"He seems sane," he admitted doubtfully. "'Tis hard to tell. From his speech — I think some injury to his brain. Has he ever received violence from any here? Some blow to the head?" And McLeod turned ashy white. "Your daughter seems to possess much attraction for him. She may explain matters. We can do little without her story."

"She must inform us immediately. Sergeant Pere must be avenged. He was always a good friend to me, though at the last, he said strange things as to his former occupation."

Brother Alonzo smiled. "Let him rest," he said gently. "Many a weed grows sweet flowers, my son. Whatever he had been, he was a brave man. From what I gathered from

your daughter, he died to save her honor. She may have spoken wildly — but he died for her sake — loved her well enough to die for. Who of us could do more?"

"At times, I thought he loved her overmuch," came the almost bitter reply. And the doctor, leading the way to the inner room, followed by his companion, silently agreed. He, though professing to love all men, had, with the father, known the touch of jealous dislike.

They came to the rough trestles, on which, in a rough box of undressed pine, lay all that was mortal of the rough old soldier of whom they spoke. And both heaved heartfelt sighs of deep regret as they gazed on the still, scarred features, whose frown or smile, loves or hatreds, were beyond the judgment of mankind. They stood for several silent minutes, each lost in thought, thinking of what they owed him. Neither was aware of the debt, but had the father known his account, the tear stealing down his furrowed cheek would have been as naught to the agony of soul his knowledge would have brought forth. Brother Alonzo, of course, owed little, save the priestly affection he freely offered to everyone. But he, even, discovered a pang of sorrow at the passing of one who had died to save a girl he loved.

He turned to the window, leading his companion. "We must not disturb the maid," he said, after a glance in at her sleeping, near white of face as her more deeply slumbering betrothed. "Though we have talked all night, I have one most important item to mention. You knew, of course, the reason of my return. The Indian remains with my master, whose side I reach immediately after my last duty is here performed. Now, friend, do not start — my most important duty here is to burn this place to the very ground."

"Burn Fort Toronto? This place!" gasped the other, and the doctor nodded.

"Such is my order, and I must obey. I am commanded by the Abbe, to utterly destroy by fire the Fort of Toronto, first taking all provisions and stores from within its walls. These are to be forwarded to Fort Niagara. You are first to know of this. Captain de Celeron, even, is ignorant of the intention of my master. I should not have deemed it wise to allow him to remain in command, but, as matters go, 'twill not matter now. I, who have some knowledge of medicine, deem the

young man mad — what his superiors may think can be no concern of mine."

"There will be indeed much to do, then. Provisions are plentiful, and the packs of pelts far above the ordinary. We did not ship many to Mount Royal last year, the snow was light and the roads bad."

"They will never journey there, my son," Brother Alonzo smiled. "News reached my master of wild scenes at that place — robbery and theft go unpunished hand in hand. Confusion, strife — reign among those in authority — and the British contemplate advances into our territory. The Abbe is far too wise to furnish the sinews of war to the enemy."

"But New France outnumbers them both in money and men, reverend sir. They cannot succeed," McLeod boasted, and his companion gently smiled.

"That is in the hands of God, my son," he said. "At all events, the Abbe Picquet will leave naught undone to prevent such invasion. That is assured. Now, to business. In what manner are these stores to be conveyed to Fort Niagara?"

"Do we travel with them, reverend sir? The young man —"

"Ah, I regret his appearance here. I would I might assist him."

"You can," McLeod burst out impulsively. "I should have told you long ere this. He is not, and never was, a spy. His grandfather is Jacques Birnon — a friend of the Abbe; the young man would have written that information, had he been permitted."

"How know you this, my son?" exclaimed the doctor. "Are you sure?"

"Reverend sir, I will confess myself. I am not only a storekeeper. My daughter bears the title of Countess de Laudonniere. Long ago I departed from France, coming hither to bury a past. This young man comes to inform me the world is free to me again. His grandfather, Jacques Birnon, desires my return; has gained a pardon for my offenses. See — I have it here. This is the errand on which the young man came, to be branded as spy by a madman."

"Do you say he is what he claims to be, he is free to go where he pleases. My master will regret his hastiness, when he knows how near he came to the ending of so old a friend-

ship. Does Jacques Birnon come to know, there will be an end to further finances, I fear, for my master's many projects." And the doctor made a wry face. He knew how many thousand francs had left the pockets of the old Huguenot, to willingly further the schemes of a most honest Jesuit. "Well, well, there has been little harm done. The boy has found a wife. I trust you have agreed, my son?" And the Count de Laudonniere smiled a happy assurance. Though, close at hand, lay the dead body of a man who had saved to him many times more than the value of his ancient title, one who should, by right, have also enjoyed a share of this world's pleasure, thoughts of a daughter's assured future, her happiness, outweighed sorrow at the loss of a rough old sergeant of foot.

The doctor pointed to the trestled load. "He would have been quite content," he said, and the other frowned.

"I hope so," he muttered thoughtfully, "but he was a strange old fellow — in any case, would not have come with us. Perhaps — perhaps it is best so." And Brother Alonzo, nodding thoughtfully, agreed.

Outside, in the raw autumn air, Captain de Celeron paced the shore with rapid footsteps, thinking — ever thinking of that useless crime. "'Tis not to be thought of, that I, an officer, would deliberately and without good reason, thrust a man to death," he muttered. "If I could but think? Think clearly. That scoundrel Peche — he might advance me ideas of the truth, liar though he is, and always was. He sought to be of service — where can he be!"

Then he hesitated in a rambling walk; forgot to turn, drew nearer and nearer to the forest, within whose gloom lurked a man clad in the uniform of New France. A soldier, who watched the every movement of his officer, hate blazing in half-closed eyes. Corporal Peche, hunted to the side of his loot by the searching parties, at his wits' end, driven to bay, knew the only penalty of being caught. His whole future was wrapped up in those tightly rolled packs of skins, and he determined to make one last determined stand.

"'Tis death either way," he muttered savagely. "I would sooner hang than be poor again." Then he stole to a hidden canoe moored close to the shore under cover of an overhanging willow; lay down full length in the bottom, peering over the gunwale. "He may not see the cache," he growled; "if he

does —" And a murderous light lit up the depths of his crafty eyes.

Captain de Celeron strolled on, entering the shade of the spreading trees. Down a leafless alley he moved, a way that seemed to open on purpose for his blind footsteps. Beneath a giant oak he paused. Lost in thought, his eyes staring, but unseeing at what he kicked with one boot, he stood for many minutes. And Peche, watching close, swore horribly. He thought a laboriously won looting had been discovered. The brittle sticks and faded crisp leaves Captain de Celeron sent flying right and left were all that covered many louis' worth of fur, the rightful property of the King of all New France.

With a baring of yellow teeth, Peche softly crept out of his hiding place. Stole cautiously behind the quarry he stalked. Then, he made a sudden spring, caught one foot in a bramble, stumbled, and Captain de Celeron came suddenly to life.

"Name of a thousand devils, and where may you have been?" he asked angrily. Then, as the fallen man groaned, "What ails you?"

Peche cursed under his breath. For a minute he was silent. He thought the end was at hand for him. Suddenly, he resolved to die fighting — this baby-face would surely have soldiers at his back — they would be on him in a moment, and —

"I am badly injured, my Captain," he mumbled. "If you would but assist me." As his unsuspecting officer came close, he lost his lameness. His claw like hands shot out, seized at a white neck, and as they rolled struggling on the ground, he hissed, "Satan seize you, fool. Think you, *you,* could hold me?"

Together they fought on the frost-bitten mold, scattering dry sticks skyward; clawing, clutching desperately, until the Corporal rolled his antagonist face upward, holding him there for a moment to regain a spent breath. Captain de Celeron saw one desperate chance. Rolling over, eluding a grimy hand, he stumbled to his feet, and Peche gave himself up for lost. Then, he, too, sprang upright. In the distance the shouts of soldiers sounded on the still air. Thoughts of a rope restored breath to his lungs, and lent the speed of a deer to his blistered feet.

"To me! my children!" Captain de Celeron shouted, and Peche ran.

Blindly he fled. Came to the open gateway of the Fort. Without heeding where he ran, entered inside the first entrance visible, turned, to bang the heavy door with a dull thud, and drop the weighty bars into their iron sockets. Then with one glance, he knew himself within the walls of the new guardhouse.

"Safe! safe for a time, at least!" he gasped. The sounds of men striving to break in reached his ears, and he burst into horrible cursing. Moving to a window, he cautiously peeped out. The bang of a musket, the splintering of the wooden frame, hinted at sudden death, and he suddenly sank to the floor. "Fools," he rasped out, as another shot shattered the horn pane. "Fools, but I am caught — caught like a rat in a trap."

Crouching, he glanced eagerly about for something to secure the window. A bundle of blankets caught his eye, and he crawled to where they lay. "If I could but come at a plank!" he muttered. "I have it — down comes the partition."

An ax lay to his hand. Without thought of the waiting muskets outside, eager for his death, right and left he wielded the sharp steel. Down tumbled the poles, holding the planks dividing the long room in two, and as the ten-foot boards crashed to the floor he dropped his weapon, hurriedly raised their length and barricaded one window. Then, though panting with exertion, he calmly turned attention to the other and only entrance.

"Now, baby-face," he shouted contemptuously, wedging the blankets tight between the wood, "you may waste lead in plenty, an it please you." Stealing to the door, he listened eagerly for sounds of what might be going forward outside. But the thickness of the adze-smoothed frame, prevented his straining ears from hearing aught but the rapid pounding of his mad-beating heart. "Safe — for how long?" he muttered, casting his spent body on the floor. "Safe — until —" And the vision of a swaying rope caused a shudder to move his features to a hideous scowl.

Captain de Celeron quickly recovered from the effects of the struggle. Surrounded by the soldiers, coming to search the shore once again, as a last resource, he pointed to the flying figure of the Corporal, and as they saw him reach the entrance, disappear within its gate, a yell burst from many throats, and

the line of searchers straggled one after the other swift upon his heels.

"Surround the house," he shouted, first to see Peche could not escape. And as the men obeyed, "Shoot, but do not kill him. I will hang his carcass on the tallest tree that grows within a mile."

One or two of the younger men loosed a shot at the windows. But when they were closed by the planks, Captain de Celeron swore under his breath that the fugitive had for the time escaped.

The noise of the shooting quickly brought out Brother Alonzo, with Madeline and her lover. A fond father followed close, and in a few moments, the young officer had related the cause.

"We cannot come at him, at present," he said briefly, his face coloring red under the contemptuous stare of the girl. "We must starve him out. He will not hold out long, with but splinters for a meal." And the four, without comment, returned to the storehouse.

The wind, that at sunrise was but a breath, began as the day wore on to assume the proportions of a gale, blowing straight out of the chill northland, that saw its birth. The garrison, forced to do a most unwelcome sentry go over their one time Corporal, muttered of vengeance, as they shivered in the cold. One angry man loosed off a musket at close quarters, swearing by all he held dear, when taken to task for rank insubordination, his cramped fingers had closed on the trigger of themselves. Captain de Celeron, ever on the alert, accepted the statement, but continued his vigilance to the extent of marching round and round the fast-closed guardhouse.

Just as he passed the door for the third occasion, when the sky flamed red with the good night of the sun, he observed smoke rising from the roof. An eager rush of the men followed to ascertain the cause, but ere a soldier could force entrance, a roaring column of flame shot out above the shingles, and the building was doomed.

"To the well! Bring buckets," shouted the young officer. "Haste, you idiots." And as the men ran hither and thither in confused numbers, "Steady, fools. Buckets, I say. Buckets. Form a chain to the well." But all the wells and buckets in New France would have been powerless to stay the

leaping flames, fed with pitch pine and cedar, leaping skyward with furious roar.

The gale seized on blazing shingles, carrying their flaming lengths to settle with a hissing sound on the near-by, tinder-roofed buildings. In a few minutes, the quarters of the soldiers were all ablaze, and the puny hands of the garrison seemed powerless to check the spreading fire.

Alarmed by the shouting, the four inmates of the storehouse were soon at hand. Francis Birnon, stripped to the shirt, drew bucket after bucket of water, passed down by storekeeper, priest and Captain, without regard to distinction of learning, rank, or station. Madeline also added her feminine energies to the passing of the pails, but without avail. In five minutes from the commencement of the fire in the guardhouse, the stockade walls were smoldering all along their length; the storehouse one raging mass of flame.

"Sergeant Pere! The Indian maid!" Birnon shouted, seeing continued effort useless to stay the conflagration. He would have entered the door, whose opening vomited clouds of dense black smoke, but the doctor seized his arm, pointing to Madeline, cowering affrighted at such wholesale destruction, and the wiping out of the only home she had known for years.

"Save the living," he panted, as the gale swirled a shower of half-burnt embers about their heads. "The dead are beyond our assistance." And the other, lifting the terrified girl, fought his way out between the already smoldering gateposts, followed in disorder by the company lodged at Fort Toronto.

"Thank the Blessed Saints, you are safe, child," the storekeeper gasped, as he received his daughter in his arms. "Another moment and we had all burned to death."

"We are like to starve, and so reach the same end," Birnon said hurriedly. "Something must be done — that at once." And silently the others agreed. "What of the distance between this place and Niagara?" he asked, looking about for ideas. But the soot-covered soldiers were also silent. They knew the terrors of that long trail to safety were fraught with much danger to armed men. What of the one woman of their forlorn band!

"We have one canoe to do the journey," Captain de Celeron said at last, thinking of the hiding place of Corporal Peche,

whose movements he had closely observed, though appearing to be unaware. "Mademoiselle, your reverence, and,"— here he gulped back something in his throat —"this gentleman, with McLeod, had best set out at once. We others, must do the distance on foot." And again the garrison scowled to a man. "Fort Toronto will soon be in ashes. 'Tis fools' work, to waste time."

Thus came to an end a trading station founded by the illustrious De Gallissionaire, in the interests of his master, the King of France. Fired by a stray shot, at the hands of a soldier, aimed at the head of a treacherous scoundrel, and would-be robber. In the flames, perished all that was mortal of a brave man, murdered by the weapon of a madman. An Indian maid, dead by butchery at the hands of savage enemies, was also consumed in the flames, that burned to ashes the body of Corporal Peche.

History records, the Abbe Picquet, Doctor of the Sorbonne, and Prefect Apostolic of all New France, was instrumental in committing to a fiery doom, a fort, whose removal was to the interest of his beloved country. But, so much for historical writing, sometimes far from the realistic truth. Fort Toronto was destroyed — history does not need to record that fact, for the tale is a tradition that will never die. For years, the roaring lake in autumn; the gentle ripple of its waters in spring and summer; the whispering of the forest with its thousand life noises, were the only sounds breaking the silence where a trading station once hummed with activity. The founding of a mighty city on that site, undreamed of. But the restless hum of many people reaches out to that huge bowlder, lying at the foot of a taper monument, this very day. The only monument erected to the brave ones of the past, at this once deserted spot. Peace to their ashes, the pioneers of those who dwell in peace and safety, though not beneath that flag, those first ones meant to float forever.

Fort Toronto was destroyed by fire, forcing the removal of the garrison to Fort Niagara. Madeline McLeod, with her father and lover, reached that outpost in safety. They must have so done! because a musty record in New Rochelle plainly states that one, Francis Birnon, led to the altar the only daughter of the last one of the De Laudonnieres.

Of Brother Alonzo, there is no record. Probably he re-

turned to the wilds when his master, the Abbe, retired to his beloved Sorbonne. The forest giants might, had we the wit to understand leafy traditions, speak of his end! But, alas! the forest giants are near all done to death, and those that remain were perhaps striplings in that day, and their memory hazy of those times.

As for Captain de Celeron, he was not even brought to task for a murder. New France had more weighty matters on her hands than the avenging of a soldier's death. He fought on many a battle field for his country; earned great distinction, as a brave officer. And there are far worse punishments for murder than death to the murderer.

Possibly, in the night silences, memory painted with vivid brush a girl, he loved to distraction of all else: and her powerful fingers must have limned one scene. A rough uneven floor, on it, stiff and silent, a lean and wounded soldier, a faithful friend slain in a frenzy. The man, whose story enters into this veracious history; brave, in spite of his confession of coward theft, Sergeant Pere, The Sergeant of Fort Toronto!

THE END

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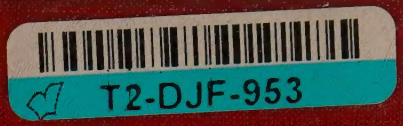
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